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Stevens
J. T. W.



AN ESSAY
ON
CHURCH POLITY:

Comprehending an Outline

OF THE

CONTROVERSY ON ECCLESIASTICAL GOVERNMENT,

AND

A VINDICATION

OF

THE ECCLESIASTICAL SYSTEM OF THE METHODIST
EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

BY REV. ABEL STEVENS, A. M.

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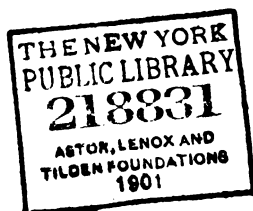
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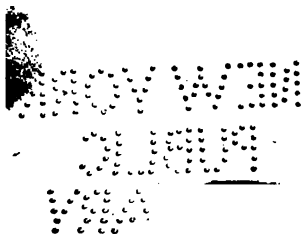
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P R E F A C E.

DURING the late secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the northern states, the writer of the ensuing pages was compelled, by his official position, to defend our church government against the misrepresentations of the seceders. He issued two "Tracts for the Times," which received the approval of the Journals, and some of the higher authorities of the church. He also delivered public lectures in several places on the subject. These labors led to the request, from various quarters, accompanied by resolutions from quarterly conferences, that the substance of the tracts and lectures should be formed into a convenient volume for circulation among our people.

The practical working of our system, though singularly useful, frequently interferes with local feelings, and is occasionally opposed by individual societies, especially when the annual appointments may not be satisfactory to them. Much of this dissatisfaction would be prevented by a better understanding of the system; but we have no popular work expounding it, none of any kind indeed, not out of print, that treats

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DREW THEOL. SEM.

on the chief, popular difficulties connected with it, namely, the absence of lay representation, the authority of the appointing power, the relative control of the system by the ministry and people, &c., &c. Such a work is, unquestionably, a desideratum. The present volume is an attempt to provide it. The Third Part is especially devoted to these questions.

It was suggested to the author that the plan of the volume might be advantageously extended, and made to comprehend the outline of the course of study on church polity, required of candidates for membership in our conferences. This has been attempted. Candidates are now under the necessity of studying a variety of elaborate works in their preparation for examination. It is not designed to supersede these works; they should be retained not only as standards for thorough study, but for constant reference. But they are, certainly, too numerous and too extensive for the purpose of conference examinations, especially while our course of study is otherwise so large as it is at present. A brief, but comprehensive, text-book, comprising an outline of the whole subject, it is believed, would be highly acceptable to both the candidates and committees.

In giving the volume this adaptation, the following departments have been adopted:—

I. **An outline of the controversy on church government in general, presenting the views of our own**

church on the subject, and the authorities which support them.

II. A discussion of the *origin* of our own system in particular, correcting the misrepresentations of seceders and Protestant Episcopalians respecting it.

III. An examination of the *structure* of our system, explaining and defending its chief features, such as its itinerancy, its episcopacy, and its popular checks. This department does not include a description of our economy in detail; such a description is unnecessary, as it is found entire and at hand in the book of Discipline.

On the first of these departments we have several elaborate standards, namely, Lord King, Powell, Emory's Episcopal Controversy—a valuable fragment, though chiefly extracted from Dr. Campbell—and Bangs' Original Church, in part—the best work given by its venerable author to our literature. In the second department, we have Emory's Defense of our Fathers, a controversial pamphlet of decisive ability, but relating to a temporary agitation, and abounding in contemporary references; a portion of Bangs' Original Church may also be referred to the same department. In the third, and most important department, we have not, so far as the author can recollect, any work whatever. In the controversies of 1828, Dr. Bond published an able pamphlet on lay representation, from which valuable quotations are made in a section of the present volume; "The

Itinerant," of that day, contained some excellent essays on the composition of our system; Dr. Emory also discussed the subject in the *Methodist Magazine* at the time: but these publications were temporary, and are now out of print. We are constantly, however, reminded of the necessity of some such exposition of our ecclesiastical economy, by the misrepresentations circulated against us, and, occasionally, by the disturbance of our churches.

As the first part of the work depends almost exclusively on historical and traditional testimonies, and these are numerous enough to fill volumes, a selection of the best has been made, and minute references given, both to verify the quotations and aid the further inquiries of the reader.

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AN ESSAY ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

PART I.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN GENERAL.

CHAPTER I.

N. PARTICULAR FORM PRESCRIBED IN THE SCRIPTURES.

Opinion of the Methodist Episcopal Church—Testimonies of Emory, Bangs, Watson, Wesley—Confirmed by the opinions of Stillingfleet, Cranmer, and other authorities—Remarks.

METHODISTS believe, generally, that no *particular form* of ecclesiastical polity is of divine prescription, and that, therefore, the mode of governing the church is left to its own discretion and the exigencies of time and place. Bishop Emory says, (quoting substantially the language of Dr. Campbell,) "That no form of polity can plead such an exclusive charter as *that* phrase, [*divine right*,] in its present acceptance, is understood to imply; that the claim is clearly the offspring of sectarian bigotry and ignorance. This we may say with freedom, that if a particular form of polity had been essential to the church, it would have been laid down in a different manner in the sacred books."—*Epis. Con.*, p. 41. Again: "The vexed question respecting the original form of government in the Christian church, though not unimportant, is certainly of no such consequence as heated disputants on any side,

mised by party prejudices or intemperate zeal, would affect to make it. The declaration of St. Paul, that 'the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost,' is applicable alike to everything external and circumstantial; and it may be confidently added, as the apostle continues, 'for he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God and approved of men.' But it may be said that the form of polity is not a thing external or circumstantial, but of the very essence of a true church. No one has ever yet produced, or can produce, a single passage of Scripture which plainly teaches this doctrine,—a thing most marvelous indeed if the doctrine be true. Now, that no such thing can be proved *from Scripture*, many of the very ablest writers on the episcopal side have over and over admitted. The celebrated Dodwell, the very champion of the highest order of high church, in the case of the non-juring bishops, in the reign of William III., concedes that all the reasoning from which men conclude that the whole model of ecclesiastical discipline may be extracted from the writings of the New Testament is quite precarious; that there is no passage of any sacred writer which openly professes this design; that there is not one which so treats of ecclesiastical government as if the writer, or the writer's author, the Holy Spirit, had intended to describe any one form of polity as being to remain everywhere and for ever inviolate. If all this be so, as every one who reads the Bible can see for himself, 'what can we conclude,' adds Dr. Campbell, 'but that it was intended by the Holy Spirit thus to teach us to distinguish between what is essential to the Christian religion, [and a true church,] and what is compara-

tively circumstantial, regarding external order and discipline, which, as matters of expedience, alter with circumstances, and are therefore left to the adjustment of human prudence?" Again: "That any specific form of church government, or mode of authenticating ministers, is not essential to the being of a church, as to the validity of the Christian ministry and ordinances, I take to be plainly the doctrine of the Church of England, if her twenty-third article be not framed in language designedly ambiguous and deceptive, which ought not to be supposed."—*Epis. Con.*, app. ii.

Dr. Bangs says: "No specific form of church government is prescribed in Scripture, and therefore it is left to the discretion of the church to regulate these matters as the exigencies of time, place, and circumstances shall dictate to be most expedient, and likely to accomplish the greatest amount of good; always avoiding any and everything which God has prohibited."—*Orig. Ch.*, No. xiii.

Watson, adopting the language of Bishop Tomline, says: "As it has not pleased our almighty Father to prescribe any particular form of civil government for the security of temporal comforts to his rational creatures, so neither has he prescribed any particular form of ecclesiastical polity as absolutely necessary to the attainment of eternal happiness. Thus the gospel only lays down general principles, and leaves the application of them to men as free agents."—*Th. Inst.*, vol. ii, p. 585.

Finally, Wesley himself says: "As to my own judgment, I still believe the episcopal form of church government to be Scriptural and apostolical. I mean, well agreeing with the practice and writings of the

apostles. But that it is *prescribed* in Scripture, I do not believe. This opinion, which I once zealously espoused, I have been heartily ashamed of ever since I read Bishop Stillingfleet's *Irenicum*. I think he has unanswerably proved that *neither Christ nor his apostles prescribe any particular form of church government*, and that the plea of the divine right of episcopacy was never heard of in the primitive church."—*Letter to Clarke, Works*, vol. vii, p. 285.

In this opinion we are sustained by many eminent authorities in other sections of the church. Bishop Stillingfleet, in his celebrated *Irenicum*, denies explicitly that there is any particular form of church government enjoined in the Scriptures. The very heading of his first chapter embraces the following sentences: "Things necessary for the church's peace must be clearly revealed. The form of church government is not so, as appears by the remaining controversy about it. An evidence thence that Christ never intended any one form as the only means to peace in the church." In chapter vi, part 2, he discusses the question at length. The heading of the chapter includes these sentences: "Whether Christ hath determined the form of government by any positive laws. Arguments of the necessity why Christ must determine it largely answered; as, first, Christ's faithfulness compared with Moses, answered and retorted, and thence proved, that Christ did not institute any form of government in the church because he gave no such law for it as Moses did, and we have nothing but general rules which are applicable to several forms of government." In chapter viii, part 2, he gives us the opinion of reformed divines "concerning the unalterable divine

right of particular forms of church government, wherein it is made to appear that the most eminent divines of the Reformation did never conceive any one form necessary; manifested by three arguments. 1. From the judgment of those who make the form of church government mutable, and to depend upon the wisdom of the magistrate and church. This cleared to have been the judgment of most divines of the Church of England since the Reformation." He places among these divines Archbishop Cranmer, with others of the Reformation in Edward the Sixth's time; Archbishop Whitgift, Bishop Bridges, Dr. Low, Mr. Hooker, in King James's time; the king himself, Dr. Sutcliffe, Mr. Hales, Mr. Chillingworth, Chemnitius, Zanchy, Peter Moulin, Fugevil, Blondell, Bochartus, Amyraldus, and, among other learned men, Grotius and Lord Bacon. "2. Those who look upon equality as the primitive form, yet judge episcopacy lawful. Augustine Confession, Melancthon, Articuli Smalcaldici, prince of Anhalt, Hyperius, Hemingius, the practice of most foreign churches, Calvin and Beza, both approving episcopacy and diocesan churches, Salmasius, &c. 3. Those who judge episcopacy to be the primitive form, yet look not on it as necessary. Bishop Jewel, Fulk, Field, Bishop Downam, Bishop Bancroft, Bishop Marton, Bishop Andrews, Saravia, Francis Mason, and others."

Stillingtonfleet (*Iren.*, pp. 413–416) gives us Cranmer's answers to questions proposed "by the clergy of the lower house of convocation" to that illustrious martyr, "and the residue of the prelates of the higher house." Among these questions and answers are the following:—

"Whether, in the New Testament, be required any

consecration of a bishop or priest, or oneley appointeing to the office be sufficient?

"A. In the New Testament, he that is appointed to be a bishop or a priest needeth no consecration by the Scripture; for election or appointeing thereto is sufficient.

"Whether (if it fortun'd a prince Christian lerned, to conquer certen domynyons of infidells, having non but the temporall lerned men with him) it be defended by God's law that he and they should preche and teche the word of God there or no, and also make and constitute priests or noe?

"A. It is not against God's law, but contrary they ought indede so to doe; and there be hystories that witnesseth that some Christian princes and other lay men unconsecrate have done the same.

"Whether it be forefended by God's law, that if it so fortun'd that all the bishops and priests were dedde, and that the word of God should there unpreached, the sacrament of baptism and others unministred, that the king of that country shoulde make bishops and priests to supply the same or noe?

"A. It is not forbidden by God's law."

"Thus far," says Stillingfleet, "that excellent person, in whose judgment nothing is more clear, than his ascribing the particular form of government in the church to the determination of the supreme magistrate."

Archbishop Whitgift, "a sage and prudent person, whom we cannot suppose either ignorant of the sense of the Church of England, or afraid or unwilling to defend it," says Stillingfleet, asserts that "the form of discipline is not particularly, and by name, set down in Scripture; no kind of government is expressed in

the word, or can necessarily be concluded from thence; no form of church government is, by the Scriptures, prescribed to, or commanded, the church of God."—*Iren.*, p. 416.

Dr. Low says, "No certain form of government is prescribed in the word, only general rules laid down for it."—*Iren.*, p. 417. Bishop Bridges declares, "God hath not expressed the form of church government, at least not so as to bind us to it."—*Iren.*, p. 417.

"They who please to consult," says Stillingfleet, "the third book of the learned and judicious Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, may see the mutability of the form of church government largely asserted and fully proved. Yea, this is so plain and evident to have been the chief opinion of the divines of the Church of England, that Parker [a Puritan author] looks on it as one of the main foundations of the hierarchy, and sets himself, might and main, to opposite it, but with what success we have already seen. If we come lower, to the time of King James, his majesty himself declared it in print, as his judgment, 'It is granted to every Christian king, prince, and commonwealth, to prescribe, within its own jurisdiction, that external form of church government which approaches as much as possible to its own form of civil administration.'"—*Iren.*, p. 417.

In Tract No. 8 of the Oxford series the author remarks, "There is no part of the ecclesiastical system which is not *faintly* traced in Scripture, and no part which is *much more* than faintly traced." Again, in No. 85, it is said, "Every one must allow that there is next to nothing on the surface of Scripture about them," (referring to episcopacy, succession, the power of the church, &c.,) "and very little, even under the

surface, of a satisfactory character." Dodwell admits the same thing when he says, "They (that is, the sacred writers) *nowhere* professedly explain the offices or ministries themselves, as to their nature or extent, which surely they would have done if any particular form had been prescribed for perpetual duration."—*Powell*, p. 26.

Bishop Beveridge says, "*Nothing can be determined* from what the apostles did in their early proceedings, in preaching the gospel, as to the establishment of any certain form of church government."—*Powell*, p. 27.

Bishop Tomline says, "Though I flatter myself that I have proved episcopacy to be an apostolical institution, yet I readily acknowledge that there is no precept in the New Testament which commands that every church should be governed by bishops."

Neander, the best living authority in church antiquities, asserts, "Neither Christ nor the apostles have given any unchangeable law on the subject. Where two or three are gathered together in my name, says Christ, there am I in the midst of them. This coming together in his name, he assures us, alone renders the assembly well pleasing in his sight, whatever be the different forms of government under which his people meet."—*Int. to Coleman's Prim. Ch.*, p. 15.

Dr. Woods, of Andover, declares, "I am far from intending to signify, that Christians in different places, or in the same place, are absolutely bound in duty to adopt the very same forms of ecclesiastical order."—*Lec. on Ch. Gov.*, p. 6.

This view of the subject was substantially entertained by the venerable Dr. White, late senior bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United

States, and, as he asserts, by "the great body of the Episcopalians in America" in his day. "Even those who hold episcopacy to be of divine right," he says, "conceive the obligation to it to be not binding when that idea would be destructive of public worship." "Much more," he justly continues, "must *they* think so who indeed venerate and prefer that form as the most ancient and eligible, but without any idea of divine right in the case." "This," he adds, "the author believes to be the sentiment of the great body of Episcopalians in America, in which respect they have in their favor, unquestionably, the sense of the Church of England, and, as he believes, the opinions of her most distinguished prelates, for piety, virtue, and abilities."*

The position thus supported by good authority, is sustained also by sound reason.

1. It is obvious that there can be no intrinsic importance in any one form of church polity, rather than another, to justify its exclusive appointment without respect to times, places, or circumstances. Fundamental doctrines and morals must, from their essential nature, be positive, but not so the mere ceremonial offices and economical arrangements of the church.

2. The positive authority of such "offices" and "arrangements" would be a formidable interference with the success of the "weightier matters of the law," in many instances. The history of the church abounds in examples of this remark. It has repeatedly been

* Case of the Episcopal Church in the United States, &c., p. 25. Bishop White, in his Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church, fifty-three years afterward, says he sees no cause to retract the leading sentiments of this pamphlet.

necessary, in order to maintain the purity of doctrines and morals, for the subordinate clergy or the people to break away from the control of authorities declared to be essential by the advocates of a positive ecclesiastical system. Had not Wesley deviated from the government of the Anglican Church in his ordination of an American bishop, the American Methodist societies would have been rent into factions, and the sacraments administered without ordination. God has sanctioned that deviation by crowning it with his blessing, and following it with results unequaled in the contemporary history of the church. The differences of civil governments, and national sentiments and customs, must seriously interfere with the progress of Christianity, if such modifications of its mere economical system be inadmissible.

3. The doctrine of divine right, in matters of church polity, attaches to those matters an importance which is contrary to the genius of Christianity, and is of pernicious tendency. It is the foundation of priestly pride and usurpation, and of most mortifying uncharitableness toward all who dissent from it. Its adherents arrogantly consider themselves the exclusive church of Christ. They shut out from their pulpits all other clergymen, however distinguished by piety, ability, and usefulness. It has led to a preposterous estimate of mere ceremonies and external usages, and created controversies, which, however excusable in the dark ages, are a disgrace to our century, and the ridicule of practical and sensible men.

4. In addition to these considerations we have the decisive fact, that the Holy Scriptures do not contain a single injunction respecting the form of church

government. They state the general principles of moral discipline; but, as we have shown by many high Episcopal authorities, they nowhere prescribe the forms and gradations of ecclesiastical offices. How absurd, then, in this age of light and practical sentiments, is the assumption of divine authority for a particular system, and its erection into a barrier, by which most of the Protestants of Christendom are precluded from the "true church?"

CHAPTER II.

PRIMITIVE CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

Propositions deduced from ecclesiastical history.—Most of the first offices of the church temporary—Scriptural evidence—Watson's opinion.

THE position so amply sustained by good authorities in the preceding chapter, namely, that though the principles of moral discipline are fully prescribed in the Scriptures, yet the particular forms of ecclesiastical government are left to the discretion of the church and the exigency of circumstances, must, we think, be obvious to all impartial readers of the New Testament. The history of the government of the primitive church further confirms it. The history of the early Christians presents the following facts:—

1. That in the beginning no systematic government existed in the church; it was a period of persecution and dispersion. Many offices were providentially created by the emergencies of the time, and disappeared with those emergencies, and acts were allowed,

and necessary, in individual and lay members, which could not consist with an organized government.

2. It was soon found necessary to consolidate the church by a more systematic economy. It adopted the one nearest at hand and most convenient, namely, the conventional system of the Jewish *synagogue*, not the divinely appointed one of the *temple*. It thus derived from the synagogue its orders of presbyter and deacon.


3. That on the disappearance of the first and temporary offices, which were created by the earliest emergencies of the church, the two orders of presbyters or bishops, and deacons, were the only ones recognized as permanently established, presbyters and bishops being identical in order.*

* Let us not be understood to say, that the two orders of presbyters and deacons were permanently *appointed* by divine authority. They were copied, we have said, from the synagogue, and merely because they were found convenient. If any section of the church should find these orders, or any other arrangements of church polity, incompatible with its circumstances, it can dispense with them, and assume any arrangement whatever which will secure its prosperity, and not interfere with the word of God. This remark is due to our Wesleyan brethren, who have but one order—that of presbyters; and who, until lately, have not practiced the usual services of ordination. Anti-prelatical writers have lost much of the weight of their arguments by conceding too much, and by seeming to assume, that though episcopacy, as a distinct order, is not of divine right, yet the orders of presbyters and deacons are. In fine, though government is essential to the church, there is no *particular form* of divine authority, and there is scarcely a greater insult to the common sense of the age, or a greater provocation of the scorn of thinking men, than the belabored controversies and arrogant assumptions which the question has occasioned. It may be

4. That on the increase of congregations in the same place, and the consequent increase of pastors or bishops there, one of the bishops being selected to preside in the occasional consultations of the pastors, became thus gradually possessed of the general oversight of the local churches, and in time, the name designating the pastoral oversight, and applied before to all the pastors, namely, episcopos or bishop, was exclusively appropriated to him. In further time, this superintendency extended to the neighboring districts, and at last, with the growth of the church in numbers and wealth, the adventitious dignities and innumerable corruptions of diocesan, metropolitan, patriarchal, and papal episcopacy were introduced.

Let us examine these propositions more in detail. It is evident that several of the offices of the primitive church were temporary, from the description which the Scriptures give of them. In 1 Cor. xii, 28, we have a minute catalogue of them. "God hath set some in the church—first, apostles; secondarily, prophets; thirdly, teachers; after that, miracles; then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." We have here *eight* different sorts of spiritual men; and by comparing this verse with the tenth, we may, perhaps, add *two more*—those possessing the power of discerning spirits and of interpreting tongues. But no one, it is presumed, will aver, that the apostle is here describing the ordinary and permanent officers of a Christian church. He is evidently speaking of the supernatural gifts and

asked, then, why we discuss it? We answer, to show its folly, and dissipate, if possible, some of the preposterous fables associated with it.



graces of the Holy Spirit, and of the persons endowed with these several gifts and qualifications for usefulness. Compare verses 1-11. (See *Punchard's View*, p. 71.)

St. Paul gives another enumeration of them in Eph. iv, 12: "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints; for the work of the ministry; for the edifying of the body of Christ." A sensible writer remarks as follows on this passage: "This passage seems to imply, that the several religious teachers here named are essential to the accomplishment of the great work for which Christ came into the world; and that the church will always need, and should always have, these instrumentalities. This may be true, and yet it may not be true that the church should always have *living teachers* answering to the four or five kinds above named. Indeed, from the very character of some of these teachers, it is a settled point that the church cannot have them as permanent officers: I refer particularly to *apostles* and *prophets*. I know not that anybody pretends that there should be an order of prophets in our churches. Inspiration being indispensable to the prophetic office, prophets, of necessity, cease to exist so soon as the gift of inspiration is withdrawn. Still, the labors of prophets were essential to the establishment of Christianity, and their recorded predictions will be of great value to the church in all periods of her existence."—*Punchard*, part ii, p. 70.

Watson remarks on the passage in Eph. iv, 11: "Of these, the office of apostle is allowed by all to

have been confined to those immediately commissioned by Christ to witness the fact of his miracles and of his resurrection from the dead, and to reveal the complete system of Christian doctrine and duty; confirming their extraordinary mission by miracles wrought by themselves." This is not admitted by *all*; but, nevertheless, as we shall endeavor to show, is the true doctrine. "If," continues Mr. Watson, "by 'prophets' we are to understand persons who foretold future events, then the office was, from its very nature, extraordinary, and the gift of prophecy has passed away with the other miraculous endowments of the first age of Christianity. If, with others, we understand that these prophets were extraordinary teachers, raised up until the churches were settled under permanent qualified instructors, still the office was temporary. The 'evangelists' are generally understood to be assistants of the apostles, who acted under their especial authority and direction. Of this number were Timothy and Titus; and as the apostle Paul directed them to ordain bishops or presbyters in the several churches, but gave them no authority to ordain successors to themselves in their particular office as evangelists, it is clear that the evangelists must also be reckoned among the number of extraordinary and temporary ministers suited to the first age of Christianity. Whether by 'pastors and teachers' two offices be meant, or one, has been disputed. The change in the mode of expression seems to favor the latter view, and so the text is interpreted by St. Jerome and St. Augustine; but the point is of little consequence. A pastor was a teacher, although every teacher might not be a pastor; but, in many cases, be

confined to the office of subordinate instruction, whether as an expounder of doctrine, a catechist, or even a more private instructor of those who as yet were unacquainted with the first principles of the gospel of Christ. The term 'pastor' implies the duties both of instruction and of government, of feeding and of ruling the flock of Christ; and, as the presbyters or bishops were ordained in the several churches, both by the apostles and evangelists, and rules are left by St. Paul as to their appointment, there can be no doubt but that these are the 'pastors' spoken of in the Epistle to the Ephesians, and that they were designed *to be the permanent ministers of the church; and that with them both the government of the church and the performance of its leading religious services were deposited.*"—*Institutes*, vol. ii, p. 575.

Besides these, there was another office—that of deaconess; which all now admit to have been temporary. Out of all this list of *eight*, or perhaps eleven, original offices of the church, we have then but one that is permanent, namely, the pastorate, which, as formed on the model of the synagogue, was composed of deacons, and presbyters or bishops. And this is permanent solely because it is the only one in the series which, from the nature of things, is necessary for the instruction and discipline of the church. We remark further, that it is permanent simply as a pastorate or general provision for Christian instruction, and not in the adventitious modifications of deacons and elders. These, as simple, convenient, and of apostolic example, should doubtless be retained wherever practicable, but can be substituted by other terms and modifications without contravening the word of God.

It is believed that this view of the subject is universally entertained, except among prelatists, who assert that the apostolic office is continued in their episcopacy; but that the apostolate was extraordinary and temporary, is obvious from its peculiar endowments and functions, which we shall consider in our next chapter.

CHAPTER III.

THE APOSTOLATE TEMPORARY.

The apostolic office temporary—What was it?—Opinion of Neander—of Dr. Woods—of Barrow—of Dr. Campbell—Episcopacy.

In the last chapter we endeavored to prove that many of the ecclesiastical offices of the early Christians were temporary, being founded on the exigencies of the times. We class the apostolate among these special offices.

The controversy relates not to the *name*, but to the *office*, as peculiarly exercised by “the twelve” whom Christ appointed as the *founders* of the church. The name in the original (ἀπόστολος, *an apostle*) simply signifies a messenger: in this general sense it is repeatedly used by the New Testament writers. Epaphroditus is called “*the messenger* (ἀπόστολον, *the apostle*) of the church of Philippi.” Phil. ii, 25. St. Paul says, in John xiii, 16, “The servant is not greater than his lord: neither is *he that is sent* (ἀπόστολος, *apostolos*) greater than he that sent him.” 2 Cor. viii, 23, “Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellow-helper concerning you: or our brethren be inquired of, they are *the messengers* (ἀπόστολοι, *the*

apostles) of the churches, and the glory of Christ." But the term is admitted by all to be applied in a distinctive sense to the *twelve*, designating their peculiar office as *special* messengers. Passing, then, the name, the question is, whether the *office* of the twelve is continued or not.

Who is more competent to answer this question than Neander? "In the apostolical church there was one office which bears no resemblance to any other, and to which none can be made to conform. This is the office of the apostles. They stand as the medium of communication between Christ and the whole Christian church, to transmit his word and his Spirit through all ages. In this respect the church must ever continue to acknowledge her dependence upon them and to own their rightful authority. Their authority and power can be delegated to none other. But the service which the apostles themselves sought to confer, was to transmit to men the word and the Spirit of the Lord, and, by this means, to establish independent Christian communities."—*Int. to Coleman's Prim. Ch.*

Dr. Woods, of Andover, gives the following opinion: "Jesus chose twelve of his disciples to be his constant companions, to hear his instructions and witness his miracles, and thus to be trained up for the special work assigned them. 'He ordained twelve,' says Mark, 'that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out devils.' These disciples Jesus finally commissioned to go forth as his apostles, and qualified them by the gift of the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of his miracles, and particularly of his resurrection, and to be infallible teachers and guides. See

Matthew xxviii, 19, 20; Mark xvi, 15, 16; Acts i, 8. The work to which they were called was a special and momentous work. It was the work of proclaiming the gospel, founding the first churches, establishing the Christian religion by preaching and by miracles, completing the volume of inspiration, and exercising, under Christ, a paramount authority in all the concerns of religion. Their commission and their endowments were adapted to the peculiar objects which were then to be accomplished. Those peculiar objects having been accomplished, the peculiarities of their office ceased. They were indeed religious teachers, ministers of the gospel; and *as such*, they have *successors*. But they were teachers and ministers in a peculiar sense, and with peculiar qualifications, and peculiar authority. Considered in this light they have no successors. Others have been sent forth as *missionaries*, as the word *apostles* literally signifies. But those first Christian missionaries were distinguished above all others; and the word apostles, in a high and peculiar sense, has been appropriated to them. Now how does the fact that Christ appointed the apostles to that peculiar work, and distinguished them by their qualifications from other ministers, prove that one set of ministers in after ages is to fill an office and possess qualifications above others? All true ministers of Christ take the place of the apostles considered *simply as gospel ministers*. But where are the men at the present day who inherit what was *peculiar* to the apostolic character and office, or what distinguished the apostles from other gospel ministers? The welfare, and even the continuance of the church requires that men, properly qualified, should, from time to time, be set apart

for the work of the *ministry*; and that the ministry should be a *permanent* institution. In this sense there is a succession, I do not say an uninterrupted, but a real succession, from the apostles to the present time. But it can no more be proved that subsequent ministers of the gospel share the peculiarities of the apostolic office, than that they share the peculiarities of the office of Moses or David."—*Lec. on Ch. Gov.*, pp. 14, 15.

Dr. Barrow, an Episcopalian, says, "The apostolic office, as such, was *personal and temporary*; and therefore, according to its nature and design, *not successive or communicable to others*, in perpetual descendance from them. It was, as such, *in all respects extraordinary*, conferred in a special manner, designed for special purposes, discharged by special aids, endowed with special privileges, as was needful for the propagation of Christianity and founding of churches."—*Pope's Supremacy*, sup. ii, sec. 4. Also, Sup. i, arg. 1, sec. 13–15. He proceeds to discriminate its extraordinary powers, "an immediate designation and commission from God—he should be able to attest concerning our Lord's resurrection or ascension—to be endowed with miraculous gifts and graces, to impart spiritual gifts—his charge was universal and indefinite—the whole world was his province, that by the infallible assistance of the Spirit, he could govern in an absolute manner. Now such an office, consisting of so many extraordinary privileges and miraculous powers, which were requisite for the foundation of the church and the diffusion of Christianity, against the manifold difficulties and disadvantages which it then needs must encounter, *was not designed to continue by derivation*; for it containeth in it divers things which apparently

were not communicated, and which no man, without gross imposture and hypocrisy, could challenge to himself. *Neither did the apostles pretend to communicate it*: they did indeed appoint standing pastors and teachers in each church; they did assume fellow-laborers or assistants in the work of preaching and governance; but they did not constitute apostles equal to themselves in authority, privileges, or gifts; for 'who knoweth not,' saith St. Austin, 'that principate of apostleship to be preferred before any episcopacy?' '*And the bishops,*' saith Bellarmine, '*have no part of the true apostolical authority.*'" Barrow elsewhere tells us, that "the most ancient writers, living nearest to the fountains of tradition, do exclude the apostles from the episcopacy," or "were not assured in the opinion, that the apostles were bishops, or that they did not esteem them bishops in the same notion of others."—*Pope's Supremacy*, sup. iv.

Mr. Punchard presents the following judicious views on the subject: "That their authority over others was based, exclusively, on these extraordinary and incommunicable peculiarities, seems to us evident from the usual form of introduction in the epistles, 'Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, *called to be an apostle,*' &c. 'Peter, *an apostle* of Jesus Christ.' That it was on their character as the inspired apostles of Jesus Christ that they relied for authority over the churches, is further apparent from numerous express references to this fact: for example, 2 Cor. ii, 10, where the apostle declares, that in granting forgiveness to the penitent offender, he acted '*in the person of Christ,*'—ἐν προσώπῳ Χριστοῦ—as the representative of Christ. The same idea is repeated in the seventeenth verse,

'speak we in *Christ*;' that is, 'in the name of Christ, as his legates.' In chap. x, 8, Paul speaks of the 'authority' which Christ had given him for the edification of the church; and in chap. xi, 5, he declares his belief that he 'was not a whit behind the very chiefest of the apostles:' and this he gives as a reason why his authority should be regarded by the Corinthians. In the twelfth chapter, throughout, he defends his claim to the confidence and obedience of the churches, by the evidence he had furnished of his apostolic and inspired character. He says: 'In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.' See also ch. xiii, 2, 3, 10; Gal. i, 11, 12; ii, 2, 6-10; iv, 14; Eph. iii, 1-7. These texts seem fully to authorize the belief, that the apostles spoke and acted authoritatively, solely on the ground of their apostolic and inspired character. The reason why Paul had occasion to insist so much upon *his* apostolical character was, that many persons, particularly the false teachers, questioned and denied his right to speak with authority in the churches; because, as they said, he was not an apostle, chosen of Christ, and empowered to act in his name."—*View*, pp. 73-4.

Dr. Campbell, the able author of the *Philosophy of Rhetoric* and the *Refutation of Hume*, has discussed in detail this question in his *Ecclesiastical Lectures*.* "Many, indeed, convinced . . . that it is in vain to search for the office of bishop, as the word is understood by moderns, in those ministers ordained by the apostles in the churches which they founded, have referred us

* See also Emory's *Epis. Cont.*, pp. 75-78.

for its origin to the apostolate itself. I have passingly observed already that this was one of those extraordinary offices which were in their nature temporary, and did not admit succession. But this point, as so much stress is laid upon it, will deserve to be examined more particularly.

“The apostles may be considered in a twofold view, —either in their general character as the first pastors of the church and teachers of the Christian faith, or in what is implied in their special character of apostles of Jesus Christ. In the first general view they are doubtless the predecessors of all those who, to the end of the world, shall preach the same gospel and administer the same sacraments, by whatever name we distinguish them, bishops, priests, or deacons,—overseers, elders, or ministers. But the question still recurs, whether, agreeably to the primitive institution, their successors, in respect to the more common character of teachers and directors of the churches, should be divided into three orders or only into two? To presume, without evidence, that the first and not the second was the fact, is merely what logicians call a *petitio principii*, taking that for granted which is the very point in dispute. But if it be alledged, that not in the general character of teachers, but in their special function as apostles, the bishops are their proper successors, the presbyters and deacons being only the successors of those who were in the beginning ordained by the apostles, this point will require a separate discussion. And for this purpose your attention is entreated to the following remarks.

“First, the indispensable requisites in an apostle sufficiently demonstrate that the office could be but

temporary. It was necessary that he should be one who had seen Jesus Christ in the flesh after his resurrection. Accordingly they were all especially destined to serve as eye-witnesses to the world of this great event, the hinge on which the truth of Christianity depended. The character of apostle is briefly described by Peter, who was himself the first of the apostolical college, as one ordained to be a witness of Christ's resurrection, Acts i, 22; a circumstance of which he often makes mention in his speeches, both to the rulers and to the people. See Acts ii, 32; iii, 15; v, 32; x, 41; xiii, 31. And if so, the office, from its nature and design, could not have an existence after the extinction of that generation.

"Secondly, the apostles were distinguished by prerogatives which did not descend to any after them. Of this kind was, first, their receiving their mission immediately from the Lord Jesus Christ, not mediately through any human ordination or appointment. Of this kind also was, secondly, the power of conferring, by imposition of hands, the miraculous gifts of the Spirit on whomsoever they would; and, thirdly, the knowledge they had, by inspiration, of the whole doctrine of Christ. It was for this reason they were commanded to wait the fulfillment of the promise which their Master had given them, that they should be baptized with the Holy Ghost. What pains does not Paul take to show that the above-mentioned marks of an apostle belonged to him as well as to any of them! That he had seen Christ after his resurrection, and was consequently qualified, as an eye-witness, to attest that memorable event, he observes, (1 Cor. ix, 1; xv, 8,) that his commission came directly from Jesus Christ

and God the Father, without the intervention of any human creature, he acquaints us. Gal. i, 1; ii, 6. To his conferring miraculous powers as the signs of an apostle, he alludes, 2 Cor. xii, 12; and that he received the knowledge of the gospel not from any other apostle, but by immediate inspiration. Gal. i, 11, &c.

“Thirdly. Their mission was of quite a different kind from that of any ordinary pastor. It was to propagate the gospel throughout the world, both among Jews and pagans, and not to take charge of a particular flock. The terms of their commission are, ‘Go and teach all nations;’ again, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’ No doubt they may be styled bishops or overseers, but in a sense very different from that in which it is applied to the inspector over the inhabitants of a particular district. They were universal bishops. The whole church, or rather the whole earth, was their charge, and they were all colleagues one of another. Or, to give the same sentiment in the words of Chrysostom, *Εἰσιν ὑπο θεου χειροτονηθεντες αποστολοι αρχοντες, ουκ εθνη και πολεις διαφορους λαμβανοντες, αλλα παντες κοινη την οἰκουμενην εμπιστευθεντες*,—‘The apostles were constituted of God rulers, not each over a separate nation or city, but all were intrusted with the world in common.’ If so, to have limited themselves to anything less would have been disobedience to the express command they had received from their Master, to go into all nations, and to preach the gospel to every creature. If, in the latter part of the lives of any of them, they were, through age and infirmities, confined to one place, that place would naturally fall under the immediate inspection of such; and this, if even so much as this, is all

that has given rise to the tradition (for there is nothing like historical evidence in the case) that any of them were bishops or pastors of particular churches. Nay, in some instances it is plain that the tradition has originated from this single circumstance, that the first pastors in such a church were appointed by such an apostle; hence it has arisen that the bishops of different churches have claimed (and probably with equal truth) to be the successors of the same apostle.

“Fourthly, and lastly. As a full proof that the matter was thus universally understood, both in their own age and in the times immediately succeeding, no one, on the death of an apostle, was ever substituted in his room; and when that original sacred college was extinct, the title became extinct with it. The election of Matthias by the apostles, in the room of Judas, is no exception, as it was previous to their entering on their charge. They knew it was their Master’s intention that twelve missionaries, from among those who had attended his ministry on earth, should be employed as ocular witnesses to attest his resurrection, on which the divinity of his religion depended. The words of Peter on this occasion are an ample confirmation of all that has been said, both in regard to the end of the office and the qualifications requisite in the person who fills it, at the same time that they afford a demonstration of the absurdity as well as arrogance of modern pretenders. ‘Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.’ But afterward, when the

apostle James, the brother of John, was put to death by Herod, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, we find no mention made of a successor. Nor did the subsequent admission of Paul and Barnabas to the apostleship form any exception to what has been advanced; for they came not as successors to any one, but were especially called by the Holy Spirit as apostles, particularly to the Gentiles; and in them, also, were found the qualifications requisite for the testimony which, as apostles, they were to give."

With these authorities and reasonings before us, we are compelled to the conclusion that the apostolate was one of the extraordinary and temporary offices we have enumerated, and cannot, therefore, be appealed to by prelatists as authority for their peculiar views of episcopacy. It is not denied, however, that episcopacy existed in the primitive church, using the word simply in the sense of a general *superintendency*. Such a supervision of the church was doubtless maintained by the apostles, and under them, and some time after them, by the evangelists. But what we do deny is, that this superintendency was divinely appointed to be a distinct and permanent order of the ministry; that it was anything more than a convenience of the times; that it claimed *exclusively* the right of ordination and other modern prerogatives of episcopacy; that there is any mysterious virtue in what Wesley has justly called the "fable" of its succession. As an expedient measure, sanctioned by apostolic example, and well adapted, under some circumstances, for the furtherance of the cause of Christ, it is approved by Methodists, and on these grounds alone do they imitate it.

It is asserted further, in our first proposition, that

acts were allowed in the earliest stage of the church which could not consist with an organized government. We need only mention the unquestionable fact, that, during those times of dispersion and trial, laymen administered the sacrament in particular cases. Mosheim says: "At first, all who were engaged in propagating Christianity administered this rite, [baptism;] nor can it be called in question, that whoever persuaded any person to embrace Christianity, could baptize his own disciples."*

CHAPTER IV.

ORIGIN OF THE PRIMITIVE CHURCH POLITY.

The government of the church copied from the synagogue—Authorities for this opinion—Grotius—Vitranga—Coleman—Stillingfleet—Watson—Archbishop Whateley—This position a proof that church government is not of divine authority.

OUR second proposition is, that "It was soon found necessary to consolidate the church by a more systematic economy; it adopted the one nearest at hand and most convenient; namely, the conventional system of the Jewish synagogue, not the divinely appointed one of the temple; it thus derived from the synagogue its order of presbyter and deacon." That the government of the church was copied from the synagogue, has been proved by some of the most erudite authorities among Christian writers. In the list of these authorities


* Murdock's Mosheim, vol. i, pp. 165-6, 1st ed. See also Eusebius's Ecc. Hist., lib. ii, chap. i; Waddington's Hist. Ch., p. 43; Campbell's Lec. on Ecc. Hist., lec. iv, pp. 62-65; lec. viii, pp. 125-127; lec. ix, pp. 151-155: Phila. ed., 1807.

may be named Vitringa, Selden, Lightfoot, Grotius, Stillingfleet, Neander, Whateley, Watson (Richard,) Coleman, &c.

Grotius declares that "the whole government of the churches of Christ was conformed to the pattern of the synagogues."—*Comment. ad Acts xi*, 30. Vitringa, in his celebrated work *De Synagoga Vetere*, has, to use the strong language of his title, "*demonstrated that the form of government and of the ministry in the synagogue was transferred to the Christian church.*" Stillingfleet has devoted the sixth chapter of the second part of his *Irenicum* to the same subject, and treats it with conclusive ability and learning. We must refer the reader to his great work for a full demonstration of the point.

Our Saviour, and the apostles after him, frequented the synagogue. It was convenient to them on three accounts: first, because they found it everywhere in their travels among the Jews, and often in foreign parts; secondly, because it allowed them considerable freedom of speech, by which they could address their new doctrines to the people; and thirdly, because they always found in it the Old Testament scriptures, by the reading and exposition of which they could prove their doctrines. On these accounts the apostles and Jewish Christians continued to resort to the synagogue, proving to their brethren that Jesus was the very Christ.

The converts thus made to the new faith were formed into congregations on the pattern of the synagogue. It is probable that whole synagogues were converted to the Christian cause without any essential change in their officers and form of service.



Watson has shown, in his *Institutes*, "that the *mode of public worship* in the primitive church was taken from the synagogue service;" "and so also," he proves, "was its arrangement of offices."—Vol. ii, p. 578. We shall illustrate these facts more fully from the highest authorities directly.

The first Christians applied the name synagogue to their assemblies. "'If there come into your assembly, (συναγωγῇ,) if there come into your *synagogue* a man with a gold ring,' &c. James ii, 2. Compare also ἐπισυναγωγῇν. Heb. x, 25. Their modes of worship were substantially the same as those of the synagogue. The *titles of their officers* they also borrowed from the same source. The titles bishop, pastor, presbyter, &c., were all familiar to them as synonymous terms, denoting the same class of officers in the synagogue. Their duties and prerogatives remained, in substance, the same in the Christian church as in that of the Jews. So great was this similarity between the primitive Christian churches and the Jewish synagogues, that by the pagan nations they were mistaken for the same institutions. Pagan historians uniformly treated the primitive Christians as Jews."

They derived the right of ordination from the synagogue. It is an embarrassing fact to prelati- cal writers that this ceremony, to which they attach such mystical and almost sacramental virtue, was not used in the consecration of the divinely appointed priesthood of the Jews, but only in the designation of their civil officers and those of the synagogue. "Their custom of ordination was evidently taken up by the Christians from a correspondency to the synagogue; for which we are first to take notice that the rulers of the church,

under the gospel, do not properly succeed the priests and Levites under the law, whose office was ceremonial, and who were not admitted by any solemn ordination into their function, but succeeded by birth into their places; only the great Sanhedrim did judge of their fitness, as to birth and body, before their entrance upon their function."—*Stillingfleet, Irenicum*, p. 288. Grotius declares that "all the rulers and elders of the synagogue were so ordained, [by imposition of hands,] from whence the custom was translated into Christianity."—*Annot. in Evang.*, p. 32.

The foregoing positions are sustained by the best authorities. Mr. Watson says: "Much light is thrown upon the constitution of the primitive churches by recollecting that they were formed very much upon the model of the Jewish synagogues. We have already seen that the mode of public worship in the primitive church was taken from the synagogue service, and so also was its arrangement of offices. Each synagogue had its rulers, elders, or presbyters, of whom one was the angel of the church, or minister of the synagogue, who superintended the public service, directed those that read the Scriptures, and offered up the prayers and blessed the people. The president of the council of elders or rulers was called, by way of eminence, the 'ruler of the synagogue;' and in some places, as Acts xiii, 15, we read of these 'rulers' in the plural number, a sufficient proof that one was not elevated *in order* above the rest. The angel of the church and the minister of the synagogue might be the same as he who was invested with the office of president, or these offices might be held by others of the elders. Lightfoot, indeed, states that the rulers in each syna-

gogue were three, while the presbyters or elders were ten. To this council of grave and wise men the affairs of the synagogue, both as to worship and discipline, were committed. In the synagogue they sat by themselves in a semicircle, and the people before them, face to face. This was the precise form in which the bishop and presbyters used to sit in the primitive churches. The description of the worship of the synagogue by a Jewish rabbi, and that of the primitive church by early Christian writers, presents an obvious correspondence. 'The elders,' says Maimonides, 'sit with their faces toward the people, and their backs to the place where the law is deposited, and all the people sit rank before rank; so the faces of all the people are toward the sanctuary and toward the elders; and when the minister of the sanctuary standeth up to prayer, he standeth with his face toward the sanctuary, as do the rest of the people.' In the same order the first Christians sat with their faces toward the bishops and presbyters, first to hear the Scriptures read by the proper reader; 'then,' says Justin Martyr, 'the reader sitting down, the president of the assembly stands up and makes a sermon of instruction and exhortation. After this is ended, we all stand up to prayers; prayers being ended, the bread, wine, and water are all brought forth; then the president again praying and praising to his utmost ability, the people testify their consent by saying, Amen.'—*Apol.* 2. 'Here we have the Scriptures read by one appointed for that purpose, as in the synagogue; after which follows the word of exhortation by the president of the assembly, who answers to the minister of the synagogue; after this, public prayers are performed by the same person;

then the solemn acclamation of amen by the people, which was the undoubted practice of the synagogue.'—*Stillingfleet's Irenicum*. Ordination of presbyters or elders is also from the Jews. Their priests were not ordained, but succeeded to their office by birth; but the rulers and elders of the synagogue received ordination by imposition of hands and prayer.

"Such was the model which the apostles followed in providing for the future regulation of the churches they had raised up. They took it not from the temple and its priesthood, for that was typical, and was then passing away; but they found in the institution of synagogues a plan admirably adapted to the simplicity and purity of Christianity, one to which some of the first converts in most places were accustomed, and which was capable of being applied to the new dispensation without danger of Judaizing. It secured the assembling of the people on the sabbath, the reading of the Scriptures, the preaching of sermons, and the offering of public prayer and thanksgiving. It provided, too, for the government of the church by a council of presbyters, ordained solemnly to their office by imposition of hands and prayer; and it allowed of that presidency of one presbyter chosen by the others, which was useful for order and for unity, and by which age, piety, and gifts might preserve their proper influence in the church. The advance from this state of Scriptural episcopacy to episcopacy under another form was the work of a later age."—*Institutes*, vol. ii, pp. 578, 579.

The impartial archbishop of Dublin, Whateley, confirms these testimonies of Watson and Stillingfleet, in the following words:—"It is probable that one cause,

humanly speaking, why we find in the sacred books less information concerning the Christian ministry and the constitution of church governments, than we otherwise might have found, is, that these institutions had less of *novelty* than some would at first sight suppose, and that many portions of them did not wholly originate with the apostles. It appears highly probable—I might say, morally certain—that wherever a Jewish synagogue existed, that was brought—the whole, or the chief part of it—to embrace the gospel, the apostles did not there so much *form* a Christian church, (or congregation, *ecclesia*,) as *make an existing congregation Christian*, by introducing the Christian sacraments and worship, and establishing whatever regulations were requisite for the newly adopted faith; leaving the machinery (if I may so speak) of government unchanged; the rulers of synagogues, elders, and other officers (whether spiritual or ecclesiastical, or both) being already provided in the existing institutions. And it is likely that several of the earliest Christian churches did originate in this way: that is, that they were *converted synagogues*; which *became* Christian churches as soon as the members, or the main part of the members, acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah.

“The attempt to effect this conversion of a Jewish synagogue into a Christian church seems always to have been made, in the first instance, in every place where there was an opening for it. Even after the call of the idolatrous Gentiles, it appears plainly to have been the practice of the apostles Paul and Barnabas, when they came to any city in which there was a synagogue, to go thither first and deliver their sacred

message to the Jews and 'devout (or proselyte) Gentiles';—according to their own expression. (Acts xiii. 17,) to the 'men of Israel and those *that feared God*;' adding, that 'it was necessary that the word of God should first be preached to them.' And when they founded a church in any of those cities in which (and such were, probably, a very large majority) there was no Jewish synagogue that received the gospel, it is likely they would still conform, in a great measure, to the same model."—*Kingdom of Christ*, pp. 83–86.

Coleman declares: "It is an admitted fact, as clearly settled as anything can be by human authority, that the primitive Christians, in the organization of their assemblies, formed them after the model of the Jewish synagogue. They discarded the splendid ceremonials of the temple service, and retained the simple rites of the synagogue worship."—*Prim. Ch.*, p. 45. Stillingfleet is so full and elaborate on the subject that we must refer the reader to his irrefutable work, contenting ourselves with two summary passages. He says, using the italics himself, "We have the *same orders for prayers, reading the Scriptures according to occasion, and sermons made out of them for increase of faith, raising hope, strengthening confidence*. We have the *discipline of the church*, answering the admonitions and excommunications of the synagogue: and last of all, we have the *bench of elders sitting in these assemblies, and ordering the things belonging to them*."—*Iren.*, pp. 287, 288. "That which we lay, then, as the foundation whereby to clear what apostolical practice was, is, that the apostles, in forming churches, did observe the customs of the Jewish synagogues. 'The whole government of the churches of Christ was con-

formed to the pattern of the synagogues,' saith Grotius, truly. 'It is evident that the governors and overseers of the churches were constituted according to the likeness of the elders of the Jewish synagogues,' as Salmasius often affirms: in which sense we understand that famous speech of the author of the commentary on St. Paul's epistles, which goes under the name of Ambrose, but now judged by most to be done by Hilary, a deacon of the Church of Rome, under which name St. Augustine quotes some words on the fifth to the Romans, which are found still in those commentaries. 'For certainly among all nations, age is accounted honorable. Hence both the synagogue, and afterward the church, had elders, without whose advice nothing in the church was done;' which words are not to be understood of a distinct sort of presbyters from such as were employed in preaching the word, but of such presbyters as were the common council of the church, for the moderating and ruling the affairs of it; which the church of Christ had constituted among them, as the Jewish synagogue had before."—*Iren.*, p. 263.

The temple service of the Jews was divinely appointed—the priesthood appertained to it; but the synagogue was a local and conventional institution, founded on not a single command, except the general one contained in Leviticus xxiii, 3. "It was introduced," says Stillingfleet, "by a confederate discipline among themselves; for although the reason of erecting them was grounded on a command in the Levitical law, where holy convocations are required upon the sabbath days, yet the building of synagogues in the land was not, as far as we can find,

till a great while after. For although Moses required the duty of assembling, yet he prescribes no orders for the place of meeting, nor for the manner of spending those days in God's service, nor for the persons who were to superintend the public worship performed at that time."—*Iren.*, p. 264. If, then, the government of the church is not prescribed by a single passage of the New Testament; if most of its original offices were adapted only to temporary exigencies, as we have shown; and if, as we now assert, its only permanent offices were borrowed not from the divinely prescribed system of the temple, but from the conventional arrangements of the synagogue, how preposterous are the importance and pretensions which the advocates of "divine right" have attached to it!

CHAPTER V.

BISHOPS AND PRESBYTERS THE SAME IN ORDER.

Identity of bishops and presbyters—Definition—Scripture proof—Testimony of the fathers—Clement of Rome—Polycarp—Justin Martyr—Ignatius—Irenæus—Jerome—St. Augustine—Hilary—Theodoret—Anglican authorities.

OUR third proposition declares, that on the disappearance of the first and temporary offices which were created by the earliest emergencies of the church, the two orders of presbyters or bishops, and deacons, were the only ones recognized as permanently established—presbyters and bishops being identical in order. The last clause of this proposition alone remains to be discussed, namely, the identity of bishops and presbyters

—the former part having been considered in our last chapter.

Before entering upon the discussion, let us understand our terms :—

Episcopus—(Greek, *ἐπισκοπος*)—signifies an overseer or superintendent.

Bishop—(Saxon, *bishop*)—is a corruption of the Latinized Greek word *episcopus*. Its analogy to the second and third syllables of the latter is obvious.

Presbyter or elder—(Greek, *πρεσβύτερος*)—signifies an *elder* or *old man*. The early Christians derived it, as we have shown, from the Jews, who applied it to the heads of their tribes, their civil officers, and the higher officers of the synagogue.

Were these orders of the primitive ministry identical? We argue that they were :—

First. From the manner in which the sacred writers use the terms. The word *bishop* is used five times in the New Testament, and in each case it is evidently synonymous with *presbyter*. It is first found in Acts xx, 17, "Take heed to yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you *bishops*, (*ἐπισκόπους*), to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood." To whom is this designation applied? The seventeenth verse informs us, "from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the *elders* (*presbyters*, *πρεσβυτέρους*) of the church. And when *they* were come, he said unto *them*," &c. Unquestionably, then, the apostle addresses those as *bishops* whom the historian calls *presbyters*.

In his Epistle to the Philippians, (Phil. i, 1,) St. Paul salutes them as the "*saints*," "with the *bishops* and *deacons*." We submit four remarks on this pas-

sage. (1.) If the apostle meant by *bishops* here, a *third* order, according to the modern prelatical use of the appellation, then while he fails not to notice the lowest order, (deacons,) he utterly neglects the second (presbyters)—a class of pastors *acknowledged by all to have been general in the primitive church*. Such an omission would be entirely irreconcilable with his character, and with propriety. (2.) If he meant by it presbyters, as we contend he did, and there were at the same time prelatical bishops at Philippi, then, while he saluted the inferior officers, he passed by the highest and most important dignitaries of the church—a supposition totally inadmissible. (3.) If he applied the term to a *third order*, then, as he uses it in the plural number, there must have been more than one prelate in the church at Philippi, which interferes with the fundamental principles of diocesan episcopacy. (4.) Our construction of the text is confirmed by the testimony of Chrysostom. He thus comments on it: “How is this? Were there many bishops in the same city? By no means; but he calls the presbyters by this name, [bishops;] for at that time this was the common appellation of both.”—*In Phil.* i, 1, p. 199, seq., tom. xi.

It is worthy of note, that Polycarp, the disciple of John, addressed an epistle to this same church about —A. D. 140, in which he exhorts them “to be subject to the *presbyters* and *deacons*.” Paul spoke of the “*bishops* and *deacons*.” Both notice the lowest office; but of the other two, (if there were two,) Paul omits one, and Polycarp the other—a circumstance which is inexplicable unless the bishops of the one were the presbyters of the other.

In Titus i, 7, it is said, "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God," &c. The apostle had left Titus in Crete to organize the Christian converts into churches, and ordain pastors among them. He describes the qualifications of these pastors. What were these bishops? Were they elders? He tells us, in the fifth verse, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain *elders* in every city," &c. After describing the necessary qualifications of these elders, he asserts, as a reason for such qualifications, that "a BISHOP, (*ἐπίσκοπον*—*episcopon*—an overseer) must be *blameless*, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry," &c.; hereby clearly implying that a *bishop* and an *elder* were identical. What could be more evident?

The word occurs again in 1 Tim. iii, 2, "A bishop, then, must be blameless, the husband of one wife," &c. The apostle, in this chapter, instructs Timothy respecting the qualifications of a *bishop*, and then immediately describes those of a deacon, without a single reference to *presbyters*, though these were an unquestionable and universal order of pastors in the ancient church, and though he was expressly directing Timothy in the appointment of its necessary officers. This fact, in connection with the passages already examined, renders it evident that he calls the presbyters bishops; and that he did not neglect them by an oversight, is manifest from the consideration that in chap. ii, 14 he refers to the *presbytery*, and in chap. v, 17 speaks of the elders or presbyters who rule well.

The last passage in which the word bishop is found is 1 Peter ii, 25, where it is applied to

our Lord, and cannot, therefore, affect the present discussion.

In this part of the inquiry we ought not to omit the passage in 1 Peter v, 1, 2, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder. Feed the flock of Christ which is among you, taking the oversight thereof"—ἐπισκοποῦντες, *acting the part of a BISHOP* toward them. There were evidently no prelatical bishops over the people whom Peter thus puts under the *episcopal* care of the presbyters.

Dr. Mason presents summarily the Scriptural argument in the following words:—"That the terms *bishop* and *presbyter*, in their application to the first class of officers, are perfectly convertible, the one pointing out the very same class of rulers with the other, is as evident as the sun shining in his strength. Timothy was instructed by the apostle Paul in the qualities which were to be required in those who *desired the office of a BISHOP*. Paul and Barnabas *ordained PRESBYTERS in every church* which they had founded. Titus is directed to *ordain in every city PRESBYTERS* who are to be *blameless ; the husband of one wife*. And the reason of so strict a scrutiny into character is thus ordered: *for a BISHOP must be blameless*. If this does not identify the *bishop* with the *presbyter*, in the name of common sense what can do it? Suppose a law, pointing out the qualifications of a sheriff, were to say, *A sheriff must be a man of pure character, of great activity and resolute spirit ; for it is highly necessary that a governor be of unspotted reputation, &c.*, the bench and bar would be rather puzzled for a construction, and would be compelled to conclude, either that something had been left out in transcribing the law, or

that governor and sheriff meant the same sort of officer ; or that their honors of the legislature had taken leave of their wits. The case is not a whit stronger than the case of presbyter and bishop in the Epistle to Titus. Again : Paul, when on his last journey to Jerusalem, sends for the PRESBYTERS of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus, and there enjoins these PRESBYTERS *to feed the church of God over which the Holy Ghost had made them BISHOPS*. It appears, then, that the *bishops* to whom Paul refers in his instructions to Timothy were neither more nor less than plain *presbyters*. To a man who has no turn to serve, no interest in perverting the obvious meaning of words, one would think that a mathematical demonstration could not carry more satisfactory evidence.”—*Works*, vol. iii, pp. 41–43. *Comp. King, Prim. Church*, pp. 67, 68.

Coleman remarks on the terms *bishop* and *presbyter*, that the former is derived from the Greek language—the latter is of Jewish origin : accordingly the apostles, when addressing Jewish Christians, use the term *presbyter* ; but in their addresses to Gentile converts, they adopt the term *bishop*, as less obnoxious to those who spoke the Greek language. (*Prim. Ch.*, p. 131.)

We argue the identity of bishops and presbyters, in the second place, from the testimony of the fathers. Clement of Rome is among the most authentic of the apostolic fathers. About A. D. 95 he wrote his celebrated epistle to the Corinthians. He rebukes them for degrading certain presbyters from their bishopric, ἀπο τῆς ἐπισκοπῆς. He mentions but two orders in the ministry at Corinth, *bishops* and *deacons*. He makes not the slightest allusion to a single or prelati-cal bishop in that church, but recognizes the expelled

presbyters as in the highest order. "The apostles preaching in countries and cities, appointed the first-fruits of their labors to be *bishops* and deacons, having proved them by the Spirit." "It were a grievous sin," he proceeds to say, "to reject those who have faithfully fulfilled the duties of their *episcopal office*;" and immediately adds, "blessed are those *presbyters* who have finished their course and entered upon their reward:" that is, blessed are those *presbyters* who have thus faithfully performed the duties of *their episcopal office*; bishops and presbyters being used interchangeably as descriptive of the same order. (*Eph. ad Cor.*, sec. 44. Apud *Coleman's Prim. Ch.*, pp. 164, 165.) Again, he says, "Who is there among you that is generous? who that is compassionate? who that has any charity? let him say, if this sedition, this contention, and these schisms, be upon my account, I am ready to depart; to go away whithersoever ye please; and do whatsoever ye shall command me; *only let the flock of Christ be in peace, with the elders that are set over it.*"—*Eph. ad Cor.*, 54.

Waddington, an Episcopalian, says of these passages, "The episcopal form of government was clearly not yet here [at Corinth] established, probably as being adverse to the republican spirit of Greece;" and Riddle says, "Clement himself was not even aware of the distinction between bishops and presbyters—terms which in fact he uses as synonymous."

Polycarp, the disciple of St. John, wrote, about A. D. 140, an epistle to the Philippian church, which corresponds entirely with Clement in recognizing but two orders in the ministry, but differs from, or rather explains Clement, by invariably limiting them to *presby-*

ters and *deacons*. He uniformly represents the *presbyters* as the rulers of the church, and the word *bishop* does not once occur in his letter. He exhorts the Philippians "to be subject to the *presbyters* and *deacons*." St. Paul, in addressing the same church, mentions, as we have seen, only *bishops* and *deacons*. It is certainly a remarkable circumstance that the apostle should omit one order and Polycarp another, if the bishops of the apostle were not the presbyters of the father; and unless we admit their identity, we are compelled to the conclusion, that while this eminent Christian father, whose writings were publicly read in the primitive churches, enjoins reverence and obedience to the authority of presbyters and deacons as the rulers of the church, he utterly forgets to claim the same regard for a much higher and more important order of the ministry. Polycarp agrees with Paul (Titus i, 5-9) in describing the qualifications of presbyters without referring at all to those which are necessary to a bishop.

The philosopher, Justin Martyr, the contemporary of Polycarp, in describing the mode of worship in the first churches, limits its officers to two orders—the deacons and antistes or presidents, evidently meaning by the latter the presbyters.*

We thus advance into the second century, finding the Scriptures and fathers uniformly recognizing but two orders in the ministry, and these are obviously presbyters and deacons. According to Mosheim and the best authorities, it was in this century that the title of bishop began to be appropriated distinctively to the

* Apol. i, c. 65 and 67. Milton has a good comment on Justin's testimony: Prose Works, vol. i, p. 76.

elder who presided in the consultations or meetings of the presbyters of each church. The increased number and business of the churches required such synods, and the orderly performance of their business required such a superintendency. This presiding presbyter was, however, considered only as a *princeps inter pares*—a president among equals, and not of a superior order divinely appointed. Ignatius (A. D. 116) is the first writer who notices the distinction, but so decisive is the evidence that most of his epistles are forgeries, that no reliance can be placed upon his alledged testimony. The very best critics declare that they have been egregiously interpolated. Yet if his authority were admissible, it would be far from sustaining the prelatical doctrine of episcopacy. Ignatius's bishops were but "pastors of single congregations,"*—presiding presbyters; and he nowhere describes them as the only representatives of the apostles, and, on this account, an order distinct from presbyters; but repeatedly affirms presbyters to be the true successors of the apostles: "*Your presbyters, in the place of the council of the apostles*"—"Be ye subject to your *presbyters*, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ our hope."—*Trall.*, sec. 2. "Reverence . . . the presbyters as the *sanhedrim of God, and college of the apostles*."—*Ib.*, sec. 3.

The later primitive writers of the church confirm our position. Irenæus, who died about A. D. 202, evidently uses the names bishops and presbyters as convertible terms. Speaking of certain heretics, he says: "When we refer them to that apostolic tradition which is preserved in the churches, through the succession of their presbyters, these men oppose the

* See Coleman, p. 199.

tradition; pretending that, being more wise than not only the *presbyters*, but the apostles themselves, they have found the uncorrupted truth.”—*Adv. Haer.*, lib. iii, ch. ii, sec. 2. Continuing the same course of reasoning, the author, in the next section, again styles these same presbyters *bishops*: “We can enumerate those who were constituted by the apostles *bishops* in the churches; their successors, also, even down to our time. But because it would be tedious, in such a volume as this, to enumerate the successions in all the churches, showing to you the tradition and declared faith of the greatest, and most ancient, and noted church, founded at Rome by the two glorious apostles, Peter and Paul, which she received from the apostles, and is come to us through the successions of the bishops, we confound all who conclude otherwise than they ought, by what means soever they do so.”—*Ibid.*, chap. iii, sec. 1.

“The very same traditions and successions,” says Coleman, (p. 170,) “which are here ascribed to the bishops, are just above assigned also to the presbyters;” and he speaks of Polycarp as a bishop in one place, and in another as a “*blessed and apostolic presbyter*.”

Again, he says, that they who cease to serve the church in the ministry are a reproach to the sacred order of the *presbyters*; but he had just before styled these same persons *bishops*.

In his letter to the Roman Bishop Victor, he speaks of the *presbyters* who had presided over the church in that city before that *bishop*. One of these bishops was the predecessor of Victor Anicetus, whom Polycarp endeavored in vain to persuade “to retain the

usage of the *presbyters* who had preceded him.”—*Euseb. Eccl. Hist.*, lib. v, c. 24.

Similar testimonies from Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, &c., may be found in Campbell, Coleman, &c. We pass to some from the later fathers. That of Jerome, in the fifth century, not only asserts our position, but declares the manner in which the name bishop was changed from its indiscriminate application to all presbyters to its distinctive application to the presiding presbyter. He says: “A *presbyter*, therefore, is the *same* as a *bishop*: and before there were, *by the instigation of the devil*, parties in religion, and it was said among different people, *I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas*, the churches were governed by *the joint counsel of the presbyters*; but *afterward*, when every one accounted those whom he baptized as belonging to himself and not to Christ, it was *decreed throughout the whole world* that one, chosen from among the presbyters, should be put over the rest, and that the whole care of the church should be committed to him, and the seeds of schism taken away.

“Should any think that this is only my own private opinion, and not the doctrine of the Scriptures, let him read the words of the apostle in his Epistle to the Philippians: ‘Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons,’ &c. Philippi is a *single* city of Macedonia; and certainly in one city there could not be *several bishops*, as they are now styled; but as they, at that time, called the very same persons bishops whom they called presbyters, the apostle has spoken without distinction of bishops as presbyters.

"Should this matter yet appear doubtful to any one, unless it be proved by an additional testimony, it is written in the Acts of the Apostles, that when Paul had come to Miletus, he sent to Ephesus, and called the presbyters of that church, and, among other things, said to them, 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you bishops.' Take particular notice that calling the *presbyters* of the single city of Ephesus, he afterward names the same persons *bishops*."

After further quotations from the Epistle to the Hebrews, and from Peter, he proceeds: "Our intention in these remarks is to show that, among the ancients, *presbyters and bishops were the very same*; but *by little and little*, that the plants of dissension might be plucked up, the whole concern was devolved upon an individual. As the presbyters, therefore, *knew* that they are subjected, *by the custom of the church*, to him who is set over them, so let the bishops know that they are greater than presbyters *more by custom than by any real appointment of Christ*."*

St. Augustine, the celebrated contemporary of Jerome, gives the same opinion: "The office of a bishop is above the office of a priest [presbyter] not by the authority of Scripture, but after the names of honor which, through the custom of the church, have now obtained."—*Jewel's Defense*, pp. 122, 123.

The author of the commentaries on St. Paul's epistles, supposed by some to be Ambrose and by others Hilary, (A. D. 384,) says: "The apostle calls Timothy, created by him *a presbyter*, a bishop; for the first

* Mason's Works, vol. iii, pp. 225-228. On Jerome's contradictions, see Stillingfleet, Am. ed., p. 302.

presbyters were called bishops.”—*Comment. in Eph.*, iv, 11, 12. *Inter. Op. Ambrose.*

Chrysostom (A. D. 407) says: “Wherefore, as I said, presbyters were anciently called bishops and stewards of Christ, and bishops were called presbyters. For this reason, even now, many bishops speak of their fellow-presbyter and fellow-minister; and finally, the name of bishop and presbyter is given to each indiscriminately.”—*Ep. ad Phil.*, tom. ii, p. 194.

Theodoret, immediately after Chrysostom, in commenting upon St. Paul’s words, (Phil. i, 1,) declares that bishops and presbyters “had, at that time, the same names, as we have from the history of the Acts of the Apostles.” He says: “It is evident that he [St. Paul, in his instructions to Titus] denominates the presbyters bishops,” (*Ep. ad Phil.*, p. 445, tom. iii;) and of Phil. ii, 25, he says, that “those who, in the beginning of the epistle, are called bishops, evidently belonged to the grade of the presbytery.”—*Ibid.*, p. 459. On 1 Tim. iii, 1, he affirms that Paul “calls the presbyter a bishop, as we have had occasion to show in our commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians.”—*Ep. ad Tim.*, p. 652.

Coleman (chap. vi) gives similar and abundant testimonies to show that the same opinion was generally entertained even through the middle ages, and Giesler declares “that the distinction between the divine and the ecclesiastical appointment, *institutio*, was of less importance in the middle ages than in the modern Catholic Church, and this view of the original identity of bishops and presbyters was of no practical importance. It was not till after the Reformation that it was attacked. Michael de Medina, about A. D. 1570,

does not hesitate to assert that those fathers were essentially heretics; but adds, that out of respect for these fathers, this heresy in them is not to be condemned. Bellarmine declares this a 'very inconsiderate sentiment.' Thenceforth all Catholics, as well as English Episcopalians, maintain an original difference between bishop and presbyter."

Pages might be filled with authorities to prove that the prerogatives afterward limited to bishops originally pertained to presbyters, especially the one now considered by prelatists the most important—the power of ordination. For the Scriptural and primitive examples we must refer the reader to Bangs' *Original Church*, No. 5; and for still further authorities, to Coleman's *Primitive Church*, chap. vi. The example of the church of Alexandria furnishes a complete vindication of Mr. Wesley's ~~ordination~~ of the American bishops. The following is Goode's translation of the account given by Eutychius of the case of the Alexandrian Church:—

"His words are these: after mentioning that Mark the evangelist went and preached at Alexandria, and appointed Hananias the first patriarch there, he adds, 'Moreover he appointed twelve presbyters with Hananias, who were to remain with the patriarch, so that, when the patriarchate was vacant, they might elect one of the twelve presbyters, upon whose head the other eleven might place their hands and bless him, [or invoke a blessing upon him,] and create him patriarch, and then choose some excellent man, and appoint him presbyter with themselves in the place of him who was thus made patriarch, that thus there might always be twelve. Nor did this custom respect-

ing the presbyters, namely, that they should create their patriarchs from the twelve presbyters, cease at Alexandria until the times of Alexander, patriarch of Alexandria, who was of the number of the three hundred and eighteen, [bishops at Nice.] But he forbade the presbyters to create the patriarch for the future, and decreed that when the patriarch was dead, the bishops should meet together and ordain the patriarch. Moreover he decreed, that on a vacancy of the patriarchate they should elect, either from any part of the country, or from those twelve presbyters, or others, as circumstances might prescribe, some excellent man, and create him patriarch. And thus that ancient custom, by which the patriarch used to be created by the presbyters, disappeared, and in its place succeeded the ordinance for the creation of the patriarch by the bishops."

Many of the best standards of the Anglican Church have admitted the right of presbyters to ordain, and their identity in order with bishops. Neale, in his History of the Puritans, declares that the reformers under King Edward "believed but two orders of churchmen in Holy Scripture, bishops and deacons; and, consequently, that bishops and priests [presbyters] were but different ranks or degrees of the same order." Acting on this principle, "they gave the right hand of fellowship to foreign churches, and to ministers who had not been ordained by bishops."—*Coleman's Prim. Church*, chap. vi. The proofs of this assertion are so numerous, that we can only refer to them. The "Institution of a Christian Man," known also as the "Bishop's Book," was prepared by Cranmer, Latimer, and eight other bishops, at the command

of the king. This work affirms "that in the New Testament there is no mention made of any degrees or orders, but only of deacons (or ministers) and of priests (or bishops.)" Two archbishops, nineteen bishops, and the lower house of convocation, subscribed to this work. The composition of the book was most deliberate and cautious. A meeting of the highest authorities of the church was appointed to determine important questions of religion. These questions were classified under heads, and apportioned to the bishops and learned divines. Each wrote his answers separately, and at a fixed time reported them in an assembly of all, and then they discussed their variations of opinion, till they could concur in a common report to be made to the convocation. At one of these meetings, held in 1537, a paper was prepared, called "A Declaration of the Functions and Divine Institution of Bishops and Priests." It was signed by Cranmer, and many bishops and other divines, and declares that "in the New Testament there is no mention made of any degrees or distinction in orders, but only of deacons (or ministers) and priests (or bishops.)" In 1540, a commission, with Cranmer presiding, affirms "that the Scripture makes express mention of only *two orders*, priests and deacons."*

"The Necessary Erudition of a Christian Man," approved by parliament in 1543, and prefaced by an epistle from the king, declares "that priests [*presbyters*] and bishops are, by God's law, one and the same, and that the powers of *ordination* and excommunication belong equally to both," and under Elizabeth it

* See Hall's Puritans and their Principles, pp. 44, 45.

was enacted by parliament "that the *ordination* of foreign churches should be held valid."

Lord King affirms, in his *Primitive Church*: "As for ordination, I find clearer proofs of presbyters *ordaining* than of their administering the Lord's supper."—Chap. iv, p. 67.

Stillington asserts: "It is acknowledged by the stoutest champions of episcopacy, before these late unhappy divisions, that ordination performed by presbyters, in case of necessity, is valid."

Archbishop Usher, being asked by Charles I., in the Isle of Wight, whether he found in antiquity that "*presbyters alone did ordain*," answered, "Yes," and that he would show his majesty more—even where *presbyters alone* successively ordained *bishops*; and brought, as an instance of this, the presbyters of Alexandria ~~choosing~~ and making their own bishop, from the days of ~~Mark~~ till Heraclas and Dionysius. (*Coleman's Prim. Church.*)

Whittaker, of Cambridge, asserts, as the opinion of the reformers, that "presbyters being, by divine right, the same as bishops, *they might warrantably set other presbyters over the churches.*"

Bishop Forbes declares "presbyters have, by divine right, the power of ordaining, as well as of preaching and baptizing."

The episcopacy of the Methodist Church is precisely in accordance with the foregoing views, that is, it is presbyterian, our bishops being considered but presbyters in *order*, differing from presbyters only in *office*, as *primi inter pares*, first among equals. Ordination is limited to them only as a delegated power from the presbyters, and simply for considerations of

convenience. Provision is made in our Discipline for the resumption of the power by presbyters in certain exigencies.

We have, then, an overwhelming amount of the highest authorities, ancient and modern, in evidence of the fact that the Christian ministry, as recognized by the primitive church, consisted of but two orders, *presbyters* and *deacons*.

CHAPTER VI.

APOSTOLICAL SUCCESSION.

The true succession—Prelatical succession—It cannot be proved
—Objections to it.

If we have succeeded in proving the temporary character of the apostolate, and the relative identity of bishops and presbyters, in respect to order, we have equally disproved the apostolic succession, so called; but as this doctrine is the basis of the arrogance and pretension of the prelatical system, we submit some further remarks on it.

There is a qualified sense in which it may be said that there is a succession in the Christian ministry—the sense in which that term is applicable to the rulers of a state. The state dies not, though its administrators pass away. God has always maintained a ministry in his church, though changing from generation to generation. Their succession depends not, however, on any personally transmitted virtue or authority, but upon his divine and inward call, and the appointment of his providence. The true successors of the apostles do

not succeed them in the prerogatives which constituted their special office—their special authority to found and supervise the general church—their special power to work miracles—their plenary inspiration for the completion of the sacred canon—their absolute authority to appoint pastors, to excommunicate delinquents, and determine infallibly ecclesiastical questions. A genuine successor of the apostles is he who has their evangelical character—their consecration to God, their self-denial and disinterested zeal—and this character founded in an apostolic experience—repentance for sin, faith in Christ, the renovation of the heart, the indwelling and fruits of the spirit, with a divine call to preach the word, and a faithful adherence to, and promulgation of, the apostolic doctrines.

But what is the succession claimed by prelatists? It is an **unbroken series** of ordinations, through the successive bishops of the church, up to the apostles; ordinations which, by this unbroken series, possess a mysterious virtue, through which the sacraments and all ministerial functions are rendered valid, and this, too, without reference to the moral character of the administrators. Some of the greatest moral monsters of the race have been important links in the chain, yet their ministerial functions were fully valid; while the ordinations of such men as Luther, Calvin, Wesley, &c., were utterly invalid, and the sacraments performed by their successors, thus ordained, were surreptitious, and without divine sanction, the churches which they formed are not true churches, and have not the divine ordinances; but they alone are the true church who have the succession, though they may be composed, as they unquestionably have been, to a great extent, of

worldly and profligate men. We proceed to state some objections to this extraordinary position.

1. The first is, that the assumed series of ordinations cannot be proved. An able critic in the *Edinburgh Review* (1843) says: "Whether we consider the palpable absurdity of this doctrine, its utter destitution of historical evidence, or the outrage it implies on all Christian charity, it is equally revolting. The arguments against it are infinite; the evidence for it absolutely nothing. It rests not upon one doubtful assumption, but upon fifty. First, the very basis on which it rests—the claim of episcopacy itself to be considered undoubtedly and exclusively of apostolical origin—has been most fiercely disputed by men of equal erudition and acuteness, and, so far as can be judged, of equal integrity and piety."

"Again, who can certify that this gift has been incorruptibly transmitted through the impurities, heresies, and ignorance of the dark ages? Is there nothing that can invalidate orders? The chances are infinite that there have been flaws somewhere or other in the long chain of succession; and, as no one knows where the fatal breach may have been, it is sufficient to spread universal panic through the whole church. What bishop can be sure that he and his predecessors in the same line have always been duly consecrated? or what presbyter that he was ordained by a bishop who had a right to ordain?" "But the difficulties do not end here. It is asked how a man, who is no true Christian, can be a true Christian minister? how he, who is not even a disciple of Christ, can be a genuine successor of the apostles."

"Since the first century, not less, in all probability,

than a hundred thousand persons have exercised the functions of bishops. That many of these have not been bishops by apostolic succession, is quite certain. Hooker admits that deviations from the general rule have been frequent; and, with a boldness worthy of his high and statesman-like intellect, pronounces them to have been often justifiable."

Archbishop Whately declares: "If a man consider it as highly *probable* that the *particular minister* at whose hands he receives the sacred ordinances is really apostolically descended, *this* is the very utmost point to which he can, with any semblance of reason, attain; and the more he reflects and inquires, the more cause for hesitation will he find. There is not a minister in Christendom who is able to trace up, with any approach to certainty, his own spiritual pedigree." "If a bishop has not been duly consecrated . . . his ordinations are null; and so are the ministrations of those ordained by him . . . and so on without end. The poisonous taint of informality, if it once creep in undetected, will spread the infection of nullity to an indefinite extent. And who can pronounce that during the . . . dark ages, no such taint was ever introduced? Irregularities could not have been wholly excluded without a perpetual miracle. Amidst the numerous corruptions of doctrine and of practice, and gross superstitions, that crept in . . . we find descriptions not only of the profound ignorance and profligacy of many of the clergy, but of the grossest irregularities in respect of discipline and form. We read of bishops consecrated when mere children—of men officiating who barely knew their letters—of prelates expelled, and others put in their place, by violence—of illiterate and profligate laymen, and habitual

drunkards, admitted to holy orders ;—and, in short, of the prevalence of every kind of disorder and indecency. It is inconceivable that any one, even moderately acquainted with history, can feel . . . any approach to certainty, that amidst all this confusion and corruption, every requisite form was, in every instance, strictly adhered to ; and that no one not duly consecrated or ordained was admitted to sacred offices.”

Eusebius, the earliest uninspired historian of the church, though he sets out with the design of tracing the succession, assures us that it is matter of much doubt, and that he had but slight authorities to depend on respecting even the definite fields of the apostles, if they had any. He assures us he had to rely on mere report ; and respecting their successors, he says : “ Who they were . . . that, imitating these apostles, (meaning Peter and Paul,) were by them thought worthy to govern the churches which they planted, is no easy thing to tell, excepting such as may be collected from St. Paul’s own words.”—*Ecc. Hist.*, lib. iii, ch. iv.

Bishop Stillingfleet remarks : “ If the successors of the apostles, by the confession of Eusebius, are not certainly to be discovered, then what becomes of that unquestionable line of succession of the bishops of several churches, and the large diagrams made of the apostolical churches, with every one’s name set down in his order, as if the writer had been *Clarencieux* to the apostles themselves ? Are all the great outcries of apostolical tradition, of personal succession, of unquestionable records, resolved at last into the Scripture itself, by him from whom all these long pedigrees are fetched ? Then let succession know its place, and learn to veil bonnet to the Scriptures ; and, withal, let men

take heed of overreaching themselves, when they would bring down so large a catalogue of single bishops, from the first and purest times of the church, for it will be hard for others to believe them when Eusebius professeth it so hard to find them."

Calamy, to show what little dependence can be placed on these tables, gives a brief view, from the representations of ancient writers, of the "strange confusion" of the first part of the tables of the three most celebrated churches of Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome:—"The church of Alexandria has been generally represented as founded by St. Mark, and yet Eusebius speaks of it but as an uncertain report. 'They say it was so;' but he **does not** tell us who said so, nor upon what grounds. However, upon this slender authority of '*they say so*,' many others after him have ventured to affirm it as an indisputable fact, that St. Mark was actually the founder of this church. However, even in this there is no perfect agreement. Some contend that he was there with St. Peter; others, that he was there alone, being sent by St. Peter; others, that he was there only once; and others, that he returned again after his first visit. As to the time of his arrival, the period of his ministry, and the year in which this church was first founded, all its records are totally silent; and the famous Clement, from whom we might expect some information, throws not a single ray of light upon this subject.

"But even supposing St. Mark, under all these disadvantages, to have been seated in this church on his throne of polished ivory, as the fabulous legends report, and that he wrote his Gospel in it, the difficulties will increase when we proceed to his successors. His im-

mediate follower on 'the throne of ivory' has several names given to him; and as to those who come after, the representations and accounts are too various and conflicting to be credited as records of a fact.

"The line of succession which proceeds from Antioch is involved in equal, if not still greater, difficulties than that of Alexandria. Eusebius, St. Chrysostom, St. Jerome, Pope Leo, Innocent, Gelasius, and Gregory the Great, all tell us that this church was founded by St. Peter; but we learn, from superior authority, that 'they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution of Stephen traveled as far as Antioch, preaching the word to the Jews only.' Acts ix, 19. This seems to have been the occasion of introducing Christianity at Antioch. After this, as the converts needed some one to confirm them in the faith which they had newly embraced, the church at Jerusalem sent forth Barnabas, not Peter, that he should go as far as Antioch; and when Barnabas found that he needed some further assistance, instead of applying to Peter, he 'departed to Tarsus to seek Saul; and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.' Acts ix, 25, 26. In all these transactions we have not one word about Peter; but, on the contrary, the intimations appear strongly in favor of Paul, as the first founder of the church in this place.

"We read, indeed, in another place, that St. Peter was at Antioch, but the circumstance is not mentioned to his honor; for St. Paul, observing the offense he had given by his dissimulation, withstood him to the

face, which we can hardly suppose he would have done if Peter had been the founder of the church, and if he now stood at the head of his own diocese.

“Baronius, indeed, aware of these difficulties, is very willing that St. Peter should resign his bishopric at Antioch, upon condition that St. Paul, acting as his vicar, be allowed to have erected one there by his authority. But even this will not do; neither can the supposition be reconciled with the positive declarations of those who assert that he was a long time bishop there.

“If we turn from the apostles to their successors in this church, we shall find ourselves equally destitute of firm footing. Baronius assures us, that the apostles left two bishops behind them in this place, one for the Jews, and the other for the Gentiles. These were Ignatius and Euodius. Eusebius says expressly, that Euodius was the first bishop of Antioch, and that Ignatius succeeded him. But, on the contrary, St. Chrysostom, Theodoret, and the author of the Constitutions, declare, with equal assurance, that St. Peter and St. Paul both laid their hands on Ignatius; but, unfortunately, it appears that St. Peter was dead before Ignatius was bishop in this place.

“The settlement of the Church of Rome, and its much-extolled apostolical succession of bishops, is involved, if possible, in still greater perplexity, confusion, and disorder. According to some, this church was founded by St. Peter; others say it was by St. Paul; some introduce both; and others assert that it was neither. Of this latter opinion were the learned Salsmasius and others. But let us allow that St. Peter actually was at Rome, of what advantage will this be

to the succession of bishops? If Peter was there, it is equally certain that St. Paul was there also; and under these circumstances it will be hard to determine who was bishop. St. Paul was there first, and on this account he is preferred by many of the ancients to St. Peter; and in the seal of that church, the former is placed on the right hand, and the latter on the left. But still this does not determine who was bishop. To accommodate this business, they have agreed to make them both bishops; and this unhappily destroys the unity of the episcopate, by placing two supremes at the same time in the same church.

“But whatever uncertainty may accompany the question as to the first bishop, those who succeeded him are known with even less assurance. On this point, the ancients and the moderns are strongly divided. Some will have *Cletus* expunged out of the table, as being the same with *Anacletus*; and thus fixing Linus at the head of the succession, cause him to be followed by Anacletus and Clemens. In this manner Irenæus represents the case. Others will have Cletus and Anacletus to be both retained as distinct bishops, having Linus standing between them. At the same time, in some of the ancient catalogues, Anacletus is excluded; and, what is remarkable, he is not to be found at this day in the canons of the mass, and yet, in the Roman Martyrology, both Cletus and Anacletus are distinctly mentioned, and a different account is given of the birth, pontificate, and martyrdom of each.

“In the catalogue of Epiphanius, the early bishops of Rome are placed in the following orders: Peter and Paul, Linus, Cletus, Clemens, and Euaristus. But in

the catalogue of Bucher they stand according to the following arrangement: Linus, Cletus, Clemens, and Euaristus; and three names are entirely omitted, namely, Anicetus, Eleutherius, and Zephyrinus. And what shall we do with the famous Clement? Does he style himself bishop of Rome? Or how came he to forget his title?

"It has been said by some, that after he had been St. Paul's companion, and was chosen by Peter to be bishop of Rome, he gave place to Linus. But others assert, with equal confidence, and perhaps with equal authority, that Linus and Clemens, and others, that Linus and Cletus, were bishops at the same time. Tertullian, Ruffinus, and some others, place Clement next to St. Peter; Irenæus and Eusebius set Anacletus before him; and Optatus makes both Anacletus and Cletus to precede him. And, finally, as though these strenuous defenders of apostolical succession were destined to render it ridiculous by the various methods they have adopted to defend this tender string, Austin, Damasus, and others, will not allow him to grace the list, until the names of Anacletus, Cletus, and Linus, have appeared. Such is the foundation of apostolical succession in the Church of Rome! Surely it can be no breach of charity to assert that


'The bold impostor

Looks not more silly when the cheat's found out.'

"It was not, therefore, without reason that Bishop Stillingfleet observed: 'The succession here is as muddy as the Tiber itself; and if the line fails us here, we have little cause to pin our faith upon it, as to the certainty of any particular form of church

government, which can be drawn from the help of the records of the primitive church.'—*Irenicum*, p. 312. It cannot, therefore, but be evident to every unprejudiced mind, that, since such confusion and disorder appear in the front of these tables of succession, where we might most naturally expect the greatest regularity and certainty, no dependence can be placed on their authority."

2. We object to this doctrine, that while the series of the succession is thus doubtful, a failure in it involves most disastrous consequences—none less than the invalidity of the ministrations of all who have not received authority through it. Hooker, as we have seen, admits that deviations from the genuine rule have been frequent. These deviations have not only occurred among the subordinate bishops, but in the highest department of the succession—among the bishops of Rome—the popes themselves. There were sometimes two, and even three, popes at once, and, at the same time, excommunicating and cursing each other most lustily. During these schisms there was either no true pope, or no certain one, and hence a chasm in the chain. The Council of Basil pronounced Eugenius a schismatic; yet from him there descended other popes, who, to this day, are his successors—who, according to their own canons, possess no pontifical authority. Where is their apostolic succession then? Again, several popes have been heretics. Pope Liberius was an Arian; Sylvester, a magician; John XXII. taught the sleep of the soul between death and the resurrection; and John XXIII. believed the soul died with the body, as the Council of Constance says respecting him. A heretic cannot



transmit orders, according to the Church of Rome; and, hence, on her own principles, her succession is gone.

Now a deviation in one instance may extend through ages, and be ramified over all Christendom. "The ultimate consequence," says Whately, "must be, that any one who sincerely believes that his claim to the benefits of the gospel covenant depends on his own minister's claim to the supposed sacramental virtue of true ordination, and this again, on perfect apostolical succession—must be involved, in proportion as he reads, and inquires, and reflects on the subject, in the most distressing doubt and perplexity." We put the question to any candid and thoughtful man, Can it be possible that a position so capable of ambiguity, so actually uncertain, and a deviation from which, while it is a matter of such liability, is, at the same time, so disastrous, can it be possible that such a position has been made, by the infinitely wise and gracious Head of the church, essential to its validity and authority? Assuredly it cannot be.

3. The prelatical doctrine of succession tends to give undue importance to mere rites and forms. It claims, indeed, that a spiritual and mysterious virtue inheres in the unbroken succession; but this virtue is strictly and invariably dependent upon a determinate process—it can be transmitted only by a given class of men, through a given class of men, and by a given means. It must be done by ordination, done by bishops, and transmitted through bishops. A bishop can ordain presbyters, but cannot give them the power to ordain as such; he must ordain other bishops in order to transmit this power. And this marvelous virtue, so

marvelously inherent in a process which scarcely admits of variableness or shadow of turning, may be communicated—nay, most certainly has been, if the doctrine is true, *by* men whose lives have been a complication of the most enormous crimes known in our world, and *to* men equally detestable. The rival possessors of the mysterious virtue have superseded each other by cabals, by bloody conflicts, by assassinations, and yet they have unfailingly possessed and transmitted it in all its purity and power. And how? Why simply and solely by the fact that a certain form, called ordination, was performed by a certain ecclesiastical officer, who, in his turn, had been treated in like manner by a certain predecessor! Is it a wonder that strong-minded men turn to infidelity, and scorn our faith, when it thus arrays itself in absurdity? Could it more effectually expose itself to the ridicule of mankind than by such antiquated and preposterous assumptions?

This exaggerated importance given to mere rites or offices is in contrast with the whole spirit of Christianity. Christianity has its rites, simple and hallowed, but teaches them with a latitude in respect to their mode, which shows that their spirit, not their letter, constitutes their importance. The genius of Christianity is spiritual, not formal. This tenacity for modes destroys its spirituality; it is the source of Puseyism, and the infinite corruptions of Popery. The doctrine of a special mysterious virtue, inherent in the acts of a man, because of a specific mode of appointment to his office, is but a step from the doctrine that he imparts a special virtue to the sacraments, by which, independently of the moral temper of the recipient, they

save his soul; a religion of forms without morals—transubstantiation—the adoration of the host—implicit reliance on the mediation of the priest, and numerous other delusions, follow in the train.

4. Not only is the doctrine of succession contrary to the genius of Christianity, but it cannot claim a single express passage of the Scriptures for its support. This doctrine, as we have seen, is assumed as fundamental; the validity of the ministry, of the sacraments, of the whole organization of the church, in fine, depends upon it. Without it, the holiest and ablest of men are not genuine ministers of Christ, and the most devoted and useful bodies of Christians are not true churches, and can hope for heaven only by the uncovenanted mercies of God. We have already asked the question, if it can be possible that a mere historical circumstance, so liable to uncertainty, and so actually uncertain, could be made, by God, the foundation of the validity and authority of his church? We now ask a still more pressing question, namely, Can it be possible that a principle, whose integrity is so fearfully exposed, and yet is so indispensably necessary—the basis of the validity of the ministerial office—the validity of the sacraments—the validity of the entire church—can it be that a matter of such importance is left to be ascertained and maintained by the church, without a single express reference to it in the whole revelation of God? Where is there such a reference? Can an unsophisticated reader of the sacred volume find one? The essential matters of salvation are plain on the surface of the Scriptures. Men of common sense have no difficulty in learning there that they are sinners—that they can be saved from their sins.

only by the atonement—that the condition of this salvation is faith—that they should pray—be pure—assemble themselves together for worship—be baptized—commemorate the death of Christ by his supper—have the word preached by suitable men, &c.; but what mind, however keen, would, without previous prejudices, be able to detect there this fundamental condition of the validity of the ministry, the sacraments, the entire church? We do not deny that it is right, as a matter of expediency and propriety, that Christian ministers should, wherever practicable, be set apart to their work with suitable authority from their clerical brethren. But where do the Scriptures *enjoin* even this? Where, still more, do they *enjoin* that one class only of the ministry shall have power to give the necessary sanctions? And where, yet further, do they declare that this power shall have such inexplicable virtue as to render valid and efficacious the ministrations of the candidate, notwithstanding his total want of moral qualification? And where, we ask once more, do they declare that deviations from this mere form shall forfeit the ecclesiastical character and covenant claims of vast bodies of Christian men, though they may extend over a continent, and may plant, in all the world, the monuments of their usefulness and piety? It has been justly said by Dr. Woods, that this is one of those doctrines which need only to be stated to appear absurd.

5. Another and serious objection to this opinion is its essential uncharitableness. It unchurches most of the Protestant world. Unquestionably, the denominations who deny it practically, as well as theoretically, are more devoted, and by far more useful at present,

than those which maintain it. The laborers of dissenting churches are found scattered all over the foreign world, and are most efficient at home. In our own country they vastly preponderate in numbers and religious exertions. Yet a comparatively limited class stand up amid them, denouncing them as destitute of the claims of a true church—refusing to recognize their sacraments, and excluding their large ministry from the courtesies due to genuine ambassadors of Christ. Is it said that numbers are no proof of truth—that a wrong cause may outnumber a good one? Very true. If we had merely numerical preponderance, the reply would be just. Mohammedanism, Popery, heathenism, have greater numerical strength than Protestant Christianity; but if they had also greater piety and greater usefulness, then would the numerical argument be undeniably in their favor. The effect cannot be without the cause. If the great dissenting bodies have all the spiritual attributes of the true church, and accomplish all its legitimate ends more extensively than their prelatical opponents, then certainly they have a more valid claim to be considered the true church, and the bigotry which brands them with ecclesiastical bastardy is an offense against God as well as man. An opinion which logically leads to uncharitableness, so contrary to the whole genius of Christianity, cannot be founded on Christianity.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OFFICE OF DEACON.

Derivation of the office—What was it?—Evidence from the Scriptures—From the fathers—Controversy respecting it not important.

On the subjects discussed in the foregoing pages we are at variance with prelatial Episcopalians, and agree, in general, with Presbyterians. There is one ground, however, where we correspond with the former, and dissent from the latter. We refer to the office of *deacons*.

The controversy on this subject does not involve the question whether or not such an office existed in the early church, but whether it was lay or clerical. Our Presbyterian brethren contend that it was the latter; and retain it only in that form. The Scriptural references to the office sustain, we think, the position that deacons, though appointed to superintend certain inferior interests of the church, were, nevertheless, also preachers of the word—a subordinate part of the regular ministry.

The office, like that of presbyters, was derived from the synagogue. Three deacons, at least, officiated in each synagogue; and their Hebrew designation implies that they were to "nourish, support, and govern" the congregation. (See *Clarke's Com.*, Acts vi, 4.) "The *parnos*, or deacon, was a sort of judge in the synagogue, and, in each, doctrine and wisdom were required, that they might be able to *discern*, and give right judgment in things both sacred and civil. The

chazan and shamash were also a sort of deacons. The first was the priest's *deputy*, and the last was, in some cases, the *deputy* of this *deputy*, or the sub-deacon."—*Ibid.* It is obvious that the office implied, to the Jewish Christians, among whom it was introduced, a department of the sacred ministry, though a subordinate one. In the Epistles (see 2 Cor. vi, 4; Eph. iii, 7; Rom. xv, 8; Col. i, 23) the title is applied to the apostles, and to Christ.

Presbyterians found their limitation of this office to mere ceremonial services, on the consideration that it was ostensibly introduced into the church for such purposes. Acts vi, 1–6. Dr. Bangs (*Original Church*, p. 306) justly remarks on this point, that "if any man say that these were set apart for the purpose of *serving tables*, let him remember that it was a sort of service to which the apostles themselves had devoted themselves until now, and therefore it could not be incompatible with the ministerial or even the apostolic office, and hence this objection makes nothing against the position that these deacons were also preachers of the gospel."

The apostles having sustained these menial cares of the church until their duties became too burdensome, ordered the appointment of subordinate preachers, who, while ministering in the temporalities of the Christians, as they themselves had, might also, like them, preach the word.

The mode of their appointment seems to imply that their office included more than the mere service of tables. The *apostles themselves* appointed them as they did other pastors in the church. They set them apart with *solemn services of consecration*—"When

they had prayed, they *laid their hands upon them*”—using the form of ordination, which they borrowed from the synagogue, for the consecration of the Christian ministry.

The qualifications required of them would seem, by their extraordinary character, to imply something more than the *service of tables*. They were required to be men of “honest report,” which, we should suppose, would comprehend the necessary responsibility of their temporal duties; but they were also to be men “*full of the HOLY GHOST AND WISDOM*,” not, it is supposable, for the purpose merely of apportioning food among the poor, but that they might prudently and successfully supply the lack of service on the part of the apostles in the ministry of the word, and the administration of spiritual discipline, as well as in the temporal interests of the church.

Accordingly, we find Stephen immediately preaching the truth, not only before the council, but disputing with the Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and Cilicians; and being “full of faith and power,” he “did great wonders and miracles among the people.” We have no information of his performing similar labors before his ordination, by the laying on of the hands of the apostles.

Philip was also appointed to the same office at the same time; and we have recorded, in the Acts of the Apostles, the fact that he “went down to Jerusalem and *preached* Christ even to them;” and “the people with one accord gave heed unto the things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For many unclean spirits, crying with a loud voice, came out of many which were possessed

with them, and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city."

It is evident that deacons administered the sacraments. "When they believed Philip, *preaching* the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Acts viii, 2. And at verse 26, we find him baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch. In Acts xxi, 8, we read of this same Philip, "which was one of the seven," as an "evangelist."

The apostles, in giving instructions respecting the qualifications of the ministry, refer to the deacons as well as presbyters. They existed in the early church as a portion of its regular ministry, and the fathers describe their office to be such as we have inferred it from the Scriptures. Tertullian tells us that they "baptized in the absence of the bishop and presbyters." They are commonly represented as "*ministers in the word of God*"—"ministers of the mysteries of Jesus Christ," (*Ignatius to the Trollians*;) as "intrusted with the *ministry* of Jesus Christ," (*Polycarp to the Ephesians*;) as "ministers of God in Christ," (*Polycarp to the Philippians*.) The church generally has maintained, from the apostolic times, the office of deacon in the manner yet retained by episcopal bodies; and no time can be designated in which it was perverted from a lay to a clerical character.

But even though the Presbyterian view of the office were historically correct, it does not affect our right to render it a clerical order, such as it really is in Episcopal churches. The Scriptures set us the

example of such a class of public servants in the church, but they do not enjoin it. The primitive Christians had need of it under their peculiar circumstances, they copied it from the example of the synagogue; in so doing they put no obligation on the subsequent generations of the church further than to provide expedient means of good order in the administration of ecclesiastical business. Hence the English Wesleyans have no deacons, not deeming the office necessary. Any church can have them or not, as its interests require, or can modify the office, making it a lay or clerical one, as it chooses; for, as we have repeatedly said, particular forms of ecclesiastical economy are not essential to the validity of the church. The controversy, therefore, relates more to a question of historical accuracy than of practical necessity.

PART II.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL
CHURCH—ITS ORIGIN.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF THE METHODIST ECONOMY.

Not a contrived, but providential arrangement—Its successive stages—Mr. Asbury's original relation to it—Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Two of the violent assaults made on the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church within the last twenty-five years have had reference to its origin: the first implying that it is a system of oppression, *contrived and formally adopted by the clergy without consultation with the laity*; the second asserting that its *episcopacy*, in particular, was introduced in defiance of the expressed wishes of Mr. Wesley. (See *True Wesleyan*, vol. ii, No. 8.) In meeting these objections we shall, first, state *the origin of the Methodist polity in general*; second, *the origin of its episcopacy in particular*.

It should be remembered that the Methodists, with most other Christian sects, do not consider that church government ought to be modeled on that of the state. It should be neither monarchical, aristocratic, nor democratic, but founded upon the Scriptures and the actual wants of the times, provided the different parts are so balanced as not to oppress any party.

1. The Methodist economy was not *a contrived system*. It was the result of providential circumstances.


When Mr. Wesley commenced his labors in England he looked not into the future, but consulted only the openings of present duty. "Whither they were to lead he knew not," says Southey, "nor what form or consistence the societies he was collecting would assume, nor where he was to find laborers as he enlarged the field of his operations, nor how the scheme was to derive its temporal support. But these considerations neither troubled him, nor made him for a moment fore-slacken his course. God, he believed, had appointed it, and God would always provide means for his own ends."—*Life of Wesley*.

He went out preaching to the masses in the highways. Multitudes were converted. They applied to him for spiritual counsel. He combined them in small companies or societies, the more conveniently to guide them; in time they were formed into "bands" and "classes," under "leaders," and were thus placed under spiritual oversight during his absence. These societies soon found private houses too strait for their convenience. They erected humble buildings for their meetings, and thence sprung up a series of *chapels*, a result altogether unanticipated. Among the societies thus collected were occasionally found men of deep piety, sound sense, and strong natural powers, who, in the absence of Wesley, instructed the people by reading the Scriptures and exhortation. Such he took under his special direction as providential assistants in his great work, and thence arose the Methodist *lay ministry*. By the rapid multiplication of the societies, it became necessary that the preachers, or "assistants," as they were called, should travel from one to another, each supplying a plurality of appointments; and thence

arose the *itinerancy*. These assistants became, in time, so numerous, that it was necessary for Wesley to assemble them periodically, in order to examine and counsel them, and regulate their labors; thence arose the *annual conferences*, an unpretending title, indicating the simplicity of their character. At these conferences Wesley distributed his "assistants," and certain questions were asked and answered comprehending the arrangements of the new body. They were published annually in humble pamphlets, called *Minutes*; and thence arose the *Annual Minutes*. *The arrangements and regulations thus accidentally, or rather providentially, provided, gradually grew permanent, and formed the government of the sect.* When the *Annual Minutes* became numerous, their substance was digested by Wesley into a permanent document, called the *Large Minutes*, which became, and in various forms has continued to be, the *Discipline* of the body.

Thus, *societies, classes, chapels, lay preachers, itinerancy, conferences, minutes*, or the *discipline*, successively and providentially entered into the system of Methodism. At the head of this system stood Wesley, gladly acknowledged by the increasing thousands of his followers as the founder and rightful director of the whole.

Meantime, Methodism reached the colonies of this continent. A few, adopting its doctrines and name, in New-York city and elsewhere, applied to Wesley for some of his "assistants," or preachers. He sent several, and among them Francis Asbury, who acted as his *general assistant*, performing in this country the functions which Wesley exercised in England, and subject to his direction. As the preachers increased



in this country, they, from time to time, expressed their approbation of this appointment. In the Minutes for 1779 is the following item:—

“*Quest.* 12. Ought not brother Asbury to act as general assistant in America?

“*Ans.* He ought: 1st. On account of his age. 2d. *Because originally appointed by Mr. Wesley.* 3d. Being joined by Messrs. Rankin and Shadford, by express order from Mr. Wesley.”

And again, in 1782:—

“*Quest.* 19. Do the brethren in conference unanimously choose brother Asbury to act according to *Mr. Wesley's original appointment*, and preside over the American conferences and the whole work?

“*Ans.* Yes.”

And in 1784, among other conditions required of “European preachers” admitted among us, one is, that they shall be “*subject to Francis Asbury as general assistant while he stands approved by Mr. Wesley and the conference.*”

As the two countries were then under one government, the two churches were also. Wesley's “Minutes” were the discipline of the American as well as the British Methodists; and Asbury represented his person among us, vested with much greater powers than now belong to our bishops.

Thus was the American church governed, for years, by the parental direction of Wesley. Meanwhile, none of our preachers being ordained, the societies were dependent upon the clergy of the English Church in this country for the sacraments. At the Revolution most of these left the country, and the Methodists were thereby deprived of the sacraments. Many in-

sisted upon having them without ordination. A general strife ensued, and a large portion of the southern church revolted. A compromise was effected until they could apply to Wesley for a more thorough arrangement, with powers to ordain and administer the sacraments. In meeting their demand he ordained and sent over Dr. Coke, with episcopal powers, under the name of *superintendent*, to ordain Francis Asbury a "joint superintendent," and to ordain the preachers to the offices of deacons and elders. He sent also a printed liturgy, or "Sunday Service," containing forms for "ordaining Superintendents, Elders, and Deacons," the "Articles of Religion," and "A Collection of Psalms and Hymns." They were accompanied by a circular letter to the societies, stating, as a reason for these new measures, that "*some thousands of the inhabitants of these states desire my advice; and, in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch,*" &c. When Dr. Coke arrived, the preachers assembled in Baltimore to receive him and the new arrangements borne by him from Wesley. The adoption of the appointments and arrangements thus made by the father of Methodism at the request of "some thousands," is what is called the "*organization*" of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The "Minutes," which had before been the law of the church, were continued, with such additions as were required by these new arrangements of Wesley. There was no revolution of the church polity, no new powers imparted to Asbury, except to *ordain* preachers. Everything proceeded as before, except that now, the Church of England being dissolved by the American Revolution, we no longer depended upon it for the sacraments, but

enjoyed them among ourselves. All subsequent modifications took place in the manner previously appointed by Wesley, in both England and America; that is, by the action of the conferences, as providential circumstances required. Thus, then, it appears,—

1. That the Methodist polity, instead of being a *contrived* system, imposed by the ministry upon the people, providentially grew up in the progress of the denomination.

2. That Mr. Wesley was the agent of Providence in its gradual formation; and that his followers, venerating him as, under God, the father of Methodism, universally and gladly recognized his agency in its establishment.

3. That the so-called “organization” of the Methodist Episcopal Church, at Baltimore, was simply and substantially the *continuance* of the system previously appointed by Wesley, with such alterations as he, at our request, provided. In respect to the very term “*episcopal*” itself, the conference at Baltimore said, in their “Minutes” of the so-called organization, that, “following the *counsel of Mr. John Wesley*, who *recommended the episcopal mode of church government*, we thought it best to become an *Episcopal Church*,” &c.—*Minutes of 1785*. The Minutes containing this declaration were, six months after, in the hands of Wesley, and published in London, under his eye, without a word of disapprobation; and when Dr. Coke was attacked for his proceedings at Baltimore, in the London papers, he publicly defended himself by declaring that he had “done nothing without the direction of *Mr. Wesley*.”*

* Defense of our Fathers. Reply to T. T. Castleman, by a Layman.

4. That the government of the American Methodist Church is therefore truly Wesleyan in its origin, and that those who, under the name of "True Wesleyans," are attempting to destroy it, are not entitled to that appellation, but are actually opposing what was primarily the work of Wesley himself.

CHAPTER II.

ORIGIN OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPACY.

Did Wesley originate it?—Preliminaries—A series of proofs.

WE pass now to the second charge, namely, that our episcopacy, in particular, was established in defiance of the expressed wishes of Mr. Wesley.

Mr. Wesley, while he established our episcopacy, did not approve the use of the appellation "*bishop*," because of the adventitious dignities associated with it. We had been in existence three or four years under the express title of an "*Episcopal Church*," with the uninterrupted approbation of Wesley, before the name bishop was personally applied to our superintendents. Not till this term was adopted did he demur. He then wrote a letter to Bishop Asbury objecting strongly to his being "*called* a bishop." This letter has been published for years at our own Book Rooms, in Moore's *Life of Wesley*, without an apprehension that it could be validly used against us. Our antagonists have, however, adopted some of its strongest sentences as their mottoes; and under general headings, such as "*Did Mr. Wesley approve of bishops?*" &c., they have repeatedly published extracts from it adapted only for a false effect; for while their extracts are unaccompa-

nied by any qualification showing that Wesley did not condemn the *office*, which he approved and *created*, but merely the *name*, the headings and comments which accompany them are so worded as to beguile the reader, not acquainted with the facts, into the supposition that it was the *thing*, not merely the *name*, that Wesley condemned. Though our argument must reflect seriously on the candor of these representations, we are compelled to show the amazing injustice attempted to be done in this instance to Mr. Wesley and the church which he planted. Three things are to be understood in this inquiry :—

1. That Wesley was a staunch Episcopalian. What man was ever more attached to the national episcopacy of England? But he has left an express declaration on the subject. “*I believe*,” says he, “*the episcopal form of church government to be Scriptural and apostolical* ;” that is, conformable to the Scriptures and apostolic usage, though not *prescribed* by them, as he shows in the context. (See pp. 11, 12 of this Essay.)

2. That Wesley, while he believed firmly in episcopacy, belonged to that class of Episcopalians in the English Church who contend that episcopacy is not a distinct *order*, but a distinct *office* in the ministry ; that bishops and presbyters, or elders, are of the same *order*, and have essentially the same prerogatives ; but that, for convenience, some of this *order* are raised to the episcopal *office*, and some of the functions originally pertaining to the whole order confined to them, such as ordination, &c. (See his Circular Letter to American Methodists, on the ordination of Dr. Coke.)

3. That the words *episcopos* in Greek, *superintend-*

out in Latin, and *bishop* in English, have, as we have shown, the same meaning.

With these preliminaries, we recur to the above question: "Did Mr. Wesley approve of bishops?" or, what is more to the point, as connecting the question with our church, Did he appoint Dr. Coke to the episcopal office? did he establish the Methodist episcopacy? We affirm most unqualifiedly that he did. Our antagonists deny it, and reduce the appointment of Coke to a species of general supervision, declaring it to be altogether foreign to the episcopal office. Let us now look at the evidence.

1. Mr. Wesley mentions in Dr. Coke's letters of ordination, as *a reason* for ordaining him, that the Methodists in this country desired "still to adhere to the *doctrine and discipline* of the Church of England." That church was dissolved by the Revolution; he, therefore, appointed Dr. Coke, with an episcopal form of government, to meet the want. If Dr. Coke was appointed merely to some general relation to the church, without the authoritative supervision pertaining to the episcopal office, wherein did his appointment meet the reason mentioned by Wesley—"the *discipline of the Church of England*?" Wherein consists the main feature of the discipline of the English Church? In its episcopal superintendency. Wherein does our system resemble it? Certainly not in its classes, itinerancy, &c., but in its episcopal regimen. Wesley's language is sheer nonsense if this is not its meaning.

2. Why did Wesley attach so much importance to the appointment if it was of the secondary character alledged? He says, in his circular letter on Dr. Coke's appointment:—

“For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right by *ordaining* part of our traveling preachers; but I have still refused, not only for peace’ sake, but because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the national church to which I belonged. But the case is widely different between England and America. Here there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction. In America there are none, neither any parish ministers; so that, for some hundred miles together, there are none either to baptize or administer the sacrament. *Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end!*”

Scruples! What could have been his “scruples” about sending a man on such a secondary errand as our opponents assert? He had already sent Asbury and others to this country, and to Asbury he had actually assigned such a special yet secondary office as our opponents ascribe to this new appointment, but unaccompanied with the ordination and authority of episcopacy. This he had done years before, without any scruple whatever; but all this time he had been scrupling about this new and solemn measure, till the Revolution relieved him by dissolving the jurisdiction of the English bishops over this country. We say again, there is sheer nonsense in all this if Wesley merely gave to Coke and Asbury a sort of indefinite special commission in the American church, not including in it the distinctive functions of episcopacy. We can conceive of nothing in the nature of such a commission to excite such scruples, and such a commission had long since been allowed to Mr. Asbury.

Again, when Mr. Wesley proposed to Dr. Coke his ordination to this new office, some six or seven months

before it was conferred, the doctor *was startled*, (as Drew tells us in the Life of Coke,) *and doubted Wesley's authority* to ordain him, as Wesley himself was not a bishop. Wesley recommended him to read Lord King's Primitive Church, and gave him time to reflect. Coke passed several months in Scotland, and, on satisfying his doubts, wrote to Wesley, accepting the appointment, and was afterward ordained with *solemn forms* and *the imposition of hands* by Wesley, assisted by presbyters of the Church of England. Now we put it to the common sense of the reader, if all these former *scruples* of Wesley, this *surprise*, and *doubt*, and *delay* of Coke, this reference to ecclesiastical *antiquity*, and these solemn *forms*, were anything less than ridiculous if they related merely to the species of appointment asserted by our opponents, especially as this very species of commission had already long existed in the person of Asbury?

3. It is evident, beyond all question, that Wesley did not consider this solemn act in the subordinate sense of an appointment, but as an "*ordination*," using the word in its strictest ecclesiastical application. Look again at the above quotation from his circular letter. "For many years," says he, "I have been importuned . . . to exercise this right by *ordaining* a part of our traveling preachers; but I have still refused . . . because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the national church. . . . Here [that is, in respect to America after the Revolution] my scruples are at an end." Here the word *ordaining* is expressly used; and if the new appointment was not a regular "*ordination*," but a species of nondescript commission, like that contended for by our opponents,



how could it be an *interference* with "the *established order of the national church*?" How, especially, could it be such an interference in any important sense different from that which Wesley had already, for years, been exercising without "scruple," in sending to this country his unordained preachers? It was clearly an *ordination*, in the ecclesiastical sense of the term. Now there have been but three ordinations ever claimed by any sect in the world; namely, to the offices of, 1. Deacons; 2. Elders or presbyters; and, 3. Bishops. If, then, Dr. Coke was *ordained* by Wesley, as we have proved, and was not ordained a bishop, as our opponents assert, we ask these new speculators in church polity to what was he ordained? He had been a presbyter for years. To what, then, did Wesley ordain him, if not to the next office? It is folly to evade here.

Let it be remembered that Messrs. Whatcoat and Vasey were ordained elders for this country at the same time. If Dr. Coke did not then receive a higher ordination, (that is, episcopal, for this is the only higher one,) why was he ordained separately from them? And why did Wesley, in his circular letter, declare to the American Methodists that, while Whatcoat and Vasey were "to act as elders *among* them," Coke and Asbury were "to be joint superintendents *over* them?" How are we to interpret language, if ours is not the sense of Wesley?

4. Mr. Wesley, in his circular letter, appeals to Lord King's Sketch of the Primitive Church to show that he, as a presbyter, had a right, under his peculiar circumstances, to perform these ordinations. Lord King establishes beyond a doubt the second of our

above preliminary statements, and the right of presbyters to ordain. He refers particularly to the Alexandrian church, where, on the decease of a bishop, the presbyters ordained his successor. Mr. Crowther, in his "Portraiture of Methodism," and Mr. Sutcliffe, in his "Life of Coke," (both Wesleyan preachers,) and the celebrated Drew, in his "Life of Coke," say that, when Wesley communicated to Coke his wish to ordain him, he said :—

"That, as the Revolution of America had separated the United States from the mother country for ever, and the episcopal establishment was utterly abolished, the societies had been represented to him in a most deplorable condition. That an appeal had also been made to him through Mr. Asbury, in which he was requested to provide for them some mode of church government suited to their exigencies ; and that, having long and seriously revolved the subject in his thoughts, he intended to adopt the plan which he was now about to unfold. That as he had invariably endeavored, in every step he had taken, to keep as close to the Bible as possible, so, on the present occasion, he hoped he was not about to deviate from it. That, keeping his eye upon the conduct of the primitive churches in the ages of unadulterated Christianity, he had much admired the mode of ordaining bishops which the church of Alexandria had practiced. That, to preserve its purity, that church would never suffer the interference of a foreign bishop in any of their ordinations, but that the presbyters of that venerable apostolical church, on the death of a bishop, exercised the right of ordaining another from their own body by the laying on of their own hands ; and that this prac-

tice continued among them for two hundred years, till the days of Dionysius. And finally, that, being himself a presbyter, he wished Dr. Coke to *accept ordination* from his hands, and to proceed, in that character, to the continent of America, to superintend the societies of the United States.”—*Drew’s Life of Coke*.

Now we ask again, Why this reference to Lord King and the Alexandrian church—proving that *presbyters* could *ordain*—in justification of Wesley’s proceedings, if he did not *ordain*? And if he did *ordain* Dr. Coke, we again ask, as the doctor was already a presbyter, to what was he thus ordained, if it was not the only remaining office—the episcopacy? And we ask still more pointedly, what propriety was there in Wesley’s justifying himself by referring to the ordination of *bishops* by the presbyters of Alexandria, if he himself had not ordained a *bishop*? Assuredly, the view of our opponents renders Wesley utterly absurd.

5. Mr. Wesley prepared at this time a prayer book for the American churches, to be used under this new arrangement. It contains the forms for the ordination of, 1. *Deacons*; 2. *Elders*; 3. *Superintendents*; and directs expressly that all elected to the office of deacon, elder, or superintendent, should be *presented to the superintendent to be ordained*. We remark, 1. That here the very word *ordain* is used. 2. We have here the *three* distinct offices of the ministry stated in order, according to the understanding of Mr. Wesley and all Episcopalians the world over. 3. That not only is the name of bishop changed to that of *superintendent*, but the name of *presbyter*, or priest, to that of *elder*—the new names being in both cases precisely synonymous with the old ones. Now, if the change of the

former *name* implies a difference in the *office* also, why does not the change in the latter imply the same? and why do not seceders deny, then, that we have *presbyters* as well as bishops? and what then becomes of their own authority as presbyters? How dare they administer the sacraments, and perform other rights, denied by Wesley and the universal church to all below presbyters? Behold into what absurdities their logic leads them! 4. We remark that these forms of ordination were abridged from the forms in the *English Liturgy* for the ordination of *deacons*, *presbyters*, and *bishops*, the names of the latter two being changed to synonymous terms, namely, *elders* and *superintendents*. Our opponents freely grant that elder means presbyter, and that we really have the office, though not the name; yet, as soon as we mention superintendents as bishops, they fly off in a tangent. 5. These forms show that Wesley not only created our episcopacy, but designed it to *continue* after Coke and Asbury's decease.

6. By reading Coke's letter to Wesley, consenting to, and directing about, his proposed ordination, it will be seen that Messrs. Whatcoat and Vasey were ordained *presbyters* at his request, because "*propriety and universal practice make it expedient that I should have two presbyters with me in this work.*"—*Drew*. That is, Coke requests, and Wesley grants, that two presbyters shall be ordained to accompany Coke in his new office, because "*propriety and universal practice*" require that two presbyters assist a *bishop* in ordaining; and yet Coke was not appointed to the office of a *bishop*! Alas for such logic! We repeat: Coke, in this letter, requests that these two men should be made "*presbyters.*" Wesley complies; and yet, in

the forms of the prayer book or discipline, they are called "*elders*." The *name*, therefore, was only changed, not the *thing*; why, then, is not the inference just that the *other* change in these forms, that of bishop to superintendent, is only in the name, not the thing? The rule certainly ought "to work both ways."

7. Charles Wesley was a rigid high churchman, and opposed to all ordinations by his brother. The latter knew his views so well that he would not expose the present measure to interruption by acquainting him with it till it was consummated. Though Charles was a presbyter of the Church of England, and in the town at the time, yet other presbyters were summoned (one even from London) to meet the demand of "propriety and universal practice" on such occasions, while he was utterly avoided. Now, why this remarkable precaution against the high church prejudices of his brother respecting *ordinations*, if he did not in these proceedings *ordain*? If it be replied, that Charles was not only opposed to his brother's ordaining a bishop, but equally to his ordaining to the other offices of the ministry, and therefore those ordinations might have been confined to the latter, and yet such precautions be proper, we then ask again, How can we suppose Dr. Coke to be ordained to these lower orders when he had already received and exercised them for years?

8. As soon as Charles Wesley learned these proceedings he was profoundly afflicted. His correspondence with his brother (see Jackson's Life of Charles Wesley) shows that he understood them in the manner that we do, and *Mr. Wesley never corrected this interpretation*. He vindicates himself, but never de-

nies the facts. Charles speaks of Dr. Coke's "Methodist *Episcopal* Church in Baltimore," alluding to the name assumed by our church at its organization in that city. Wesley, in his reply, utters not a word in denial or disapproval of this title, but simply vindicates the necessity of his course in respect to the American Methodists. Charles, in reply, speaks of the doctor's "ambition" and "rashness." John, though he knew the church had been organized at Baltimore with the title of "Episcopal," says: "I believe Dr. Coke as free from ambition as covetousness. He has done nothing rashly that I know." Charles, in his letter to Dr. Chandler, (see Jackson,) speaks earnestly of his brother having "assumed the episcopal character, ordained elders, *consecrated a bishop*, and sent him to ordain our lay preachers in America;" showing thus what the office really was, though the name was changed. It was only the term bishop, applied to the superintendents in person, that Wesley disapproved.

9. The conference at which the church was organized terminated January 1, 1785. The Minutes were published by Dr. Coke with the title, "General Minutes of the Conferences of the Methodist *Episcopal* Church in America." The Minutes expressly say that we were formed into an *Episcopal Church*, and this, too, at the "*recommendation*" of Wesley. By July 26th, Dr. Coke was with Wesley at the British Conference. By the 26th of the preceding June, his own Journal, containing this phrase, was inspected by Wesley. The doctor also took to England the Minutes above mentioned, and they were printed on a press which Wesley used, and under his own eye. The Baltimore proceedings were, therefore, known to Wesley, but we

hear of no remonstrance from him. They soon became known, by the Minutes, to the public; and when Coke was attacked in a newspaper for what he had done, he replied, through the press, that "*he had done nothing but under the direction of Mr. Wesley.*" Wesley never denied it, but continued to show the doctor the highest consideration and confidence. How is all this explicable, on the supposition that Coke and Asbury had ambitiously broken over Wesley's restrictions?

10. One of Charles Wesley's greatest fears was, that the English preachers would be ordained by the doctor. He had prevailed upon his brother to refuse them ordination for years. He now writes, with profound concern, that "not a preacher in London would refuse orders from the doctor." "He comes armed with your authority to make us all dissenters." (See Jackson.) Now why all this sudden disposition of the English preachers to receive "orders from the doctor," if it was not understood that he had received episcopal powers, and they despaired of ever getting ordination from the national bishops? If it is replied. They believed, with Wesley, that, under necessary circumstances, presbyters could ordain, and therefore desired it from the doctor, not in view of his new appointment, but because he was a presbyter of the Church of England, then we ask, Why did they not seek it before, for the doctor had been a presbyter among them for years? Why start up all at once as soon as they learned of the new position of the doctor? And how could Charles say, in this case, "He comes armed with *your authority*," &c.; for his authority as a presbyter he obtained from a bishop of the English Church years before he knew Wesley.

11. The term bishop was not applied, in the Discipline, to our superintendents till about three years after the "organization" of the church, and Wesley's letter to Asbury was not written till *four* years after. During all this interim, however, we were called an "*Episcopal Church*." Six months after adopting the name, our Minutes were, as above stated, inspected by Wesley, and published under his eye. They were called the "*Minutes of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*;" and they expressly declared that, "following the *counsel* of Mr. John Wesley, who *recommended the episcopal mode of church government*, we thought it best to become an *Episcopal Church*." Yet, during all this interim, Wesley never uttered a syllable against this assumption! When his brother wrote him, accusing Coke of *rashness*, he replied that "the doctor had done nothing rashly;" and when the doctor was accused in the London prints, he declared, under Wesley's eye and without contradiction, that "he had done nothing without the *direction* of Mr. Wesley." What, now, does all this imply? What but that Wesley did approve our *episcopacy*—that it was established by his direction? But, four years after, when the appellation of *bishop* was applied personally to our *episcopoi*, this letter of Wesley was written. What further does this imply? Why, that it was not the *thing* that he condemned, but the *name*;—the thing had existed for years uncondemned, nay, defended by him. The very name "*Episcopal*," so far as it applied to the *church collectively*, he did not condemn; but the personal title of bishop he disapproved, because of its adventitious associations. Is it possible to escape this conclusion?

12. Finally, we affirm that this view of the subject

is the unanimous one of all good authorities among our Wesleyan brethren themselves. A man would excite a smile among the Wesleyans of England by telling them that their founder did not approve of episcopacy. The much-abused letter of Wesley to Asbury was published by Mr. Moore in his "Life of Wesley;" but *Mr. Moore himself guards against our opponents' abuse of it, fully acknowledges the legitimacy of our episcopacy*, and argues at length to show that Wesley meant and did what we contend for, and had a right to do so. No man can extract the letter from his page, and give it to the public unqualifiedly, without a consciousness of distorting its meaning. He says: "That our brethren who are in that office are *true Scriptural bishops*, I have no doubt; nor do I wish that the title should be relinquished." "He [Wesley] gave to those *episcopoi* [bishops] whom he ordained the modest title of superintendents," &c. Yet our antagonists extract from the midst of these remarks a letter to oppugn our episcopacy! When Mr. Moore's Life of Wesley appeared, it was reviewed in the official periodical of the Wesleyans. We give an extract from the review, showing the views of the Wesleyans on our episcopacy, and their sense of Mr. Moore's remarks:—

"The author has spent some time in showing that episcopacy, by name, was not introduced into the American Methodist society by the sanction of Mr. Wesley; who, though he, in point of fact, did ordain bishops for the American societies, intended them to be called 'superintendents.' To the statement of this, as an historical fact, no objection certainly lies; but the way in which it is enlarged upon, and the insertion

of an objuratory letter of Mr. Wesley to Asbury on the subject, can have no tendency but to convey to the reader an impression somewhat unfavorable to Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury, as though they were ambitious of show and title. Mr. Moore, indeed, candidly enough relieves this, by admitting that, on Mr. Wesley's principle itself, and in his own view, they were true Scriptural *episcopoi*; and that Mr. Wesley's objection to the name, in fact, arose from its association in his mind rather with the adventitious honors which accompany it in church establishments, than with the simplicity and pre-eminence of labor, care, and privation which it has from the first exhibited in America, and from which it could not, from circumstances, depart. According to this showing, the objection was grounded upon no principle, and was a mere matter of taste or expediency. Whether the name had, or had not, the sanction of Mr. Wesley, is now of the least possible consequence, as the *episcopacy itself was of his creating*."—*English Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* for 1825, p. 183.

Crowther, Sutcliffe, and Drew, as we have said, perfectly agree with our view of the matter. Watson, in his *Life of Wesley*, argues it at length, and the British Conference approved his work. Jackson, in his *Life of Charles Wesley*, discusses the whole subject. Dixon declares our episcopacy to be a true example of Mr. Wesley's views of church government.*

* "When the United States had effected their emancipation from the mother country, Mr. Wesley considered himself at liberty to act with perfect freedom in the new territory, and, we may say, to develop his views and opinions fully; and, if we mistake not, it is to the American Methodist Episcopal Church

None of these writers ever dreamed that Wesley did not appoint Coke and Asbury as bishops. They labor at length to defend Wesley, not against the charge of having ordained bishops, but of having ordained them without a right to do so, and prove that he had this right in his peculiar circumstances. Thus we see that, whatever view we take of the subject, we are compelled to one conclusion: that *Wesley did create and establish our episcopacy*. The man who gainsays these evidences must be given up as incorrigible. There can be no reasoning with him.

Here we have Wesley proposing to establish "the discipline of the Church of England" among us, and yet, according to our antagonists, it is not episcopal; the only respect in which any resemblance can be traced! Wesley and Coke had "scruples," delays, references to antiquity and solemn forms, imposition of hands, &c., conforming to the "universal practice" of episcopal ordination; and yet, forsooth, all concerning some nondescript kind of appointment, analogous to that which we give to our head missionary in Africa or Oregon! Wesley speaks of it as "ordaining," and of his refusing to use the right before the Revolution because it would have interfered with the "established order of the national church;" and yet such a mere secondary commission of Dr. Coke, such a one as had existed in the person of Asbury for years, was the

that we are to look for the *real* mind and sentiments of this great man. Obstructions removed, he instantly seized the opportunity of appointing an entire church system, on the principle of moderate episcopacy; and if we may judge of the wisdom and piety of the design by its usefulness and success, certainly we shall be prepared to consider it most providential."—*Dixon on Methodism*.

momentous *interference* with the *established order* of the national church! With what in that order could it interfere? Had the national church ever any such appointments? Wesley solemnly "ordains" Coke; and yet, say our opponents, it was not to the episcopal office, though he had been ordained to all the other offices years before! Wesley ordains two other men to the office of elders, and at the same time separately and formally ordains Dr. Coke, who already had borne this office; but still Dr. Coke's new office was not the only remaining one that could be conferred upon him! Wesley refers to the ordination of a bishop by the presbyters of Alexandria in justification of his ordination of Dr. Coke; and yet, forsooth, he did not ordain Dr. Coke a bishop! Wesley prepares for the American Church a prayer book, abridged from that of the Church of England, prescribing the English forms for the three offices of deacons, presbyters, and bishops: the two former are allowed unquestionably to be what they are in England, and yet the latter is utterly explained into something new and anomalous, answering to nothing ever heard of in the Church of England or in any other church! In these forms the old names of two of the offices are changed to new but synonymous terms: that of presbyter, or priest, to elder; that of bishop to superintendent. In the former case the change of the name is not for a moment supposed to imply a change of the thing, and our seceding opponents contentedly exercise the rights of presbyters under the name of elders; and yet, in the other case, the change of name invalidates entirely the thing, without a particle more evidence for it in the one case than in the other! Charles Wesley, being a high church-

man, was kept unaware of his brother's proceedings till they were accomplished, though he was in the town at the time of the ordination; and yet it was no ordination, but a species of appointment, against which he could have had no episcopal prejudice whatever! When he learns the facts he is overwhelmed with surprise, and in his correspondence exclaims against his "brother's *consecration of a bishop*," and "Dr. Coke's Methodist *Episcopal Church*" at Baltimore; and Wesley, in his replies, never denies these titles, but simply vindicates his ordinations, and says that the doctor had "done nothing rashly;" yet there was no bishop, no episcopal office appointed, but the doctor had fabricated it! When the preachers in England, trained under episcopacy, hear of the doctor's new office, they are, to the great alarm of Charles Wesley, seized suddenly with a desire to be ordained by the doctor, though, according to our antagonists, they fully knew that the doctor was no bishop, but the same presbyter that he had been among them for years! In six months after the organization of our church Dr. Coke publishes our Minutes, with the title "*Methodist Episcopal Church of America*," in London, under the eye of Wesley, and in these Minutes it is declared that Mr. Wesley "*recommended the episcopal mode of church government*" to the American Methodists; but no remonstrance is heard from Wesley! When Coke is condemned in the public prints for his proceedings, he publicly replies that he had done "nothing without the direction of Mr. Wesley." No rebuke follows from Wesley, but Coke goes on as usual fully in his confidence, presiding in his conferences, &c.; and yet, alas! his American proceedings

were an *ambitious plot*, contrary to the will of Wesley. We had borne the title "*Episcopal Church*," with Wesley's full approval, for four years, when, on the use of the personal title of *bishop*, Wesley writes his letter to Asbury; and yet it is not the mere personal title he condemns, but the office which, for four years, he had left uncondemned, nay, had vindicated! All the English standard writers fully understand the matter as we do and as Coke did, and even the writer from whom Wesley's letter is taken guards it against the construction of our enemies; yet they deliberately quote the letter against our system of government without a word of qualification, and in the "face and eyes" of the whole English and American Church, including the very author from whom they take it!

The latest party of seceders from our church, notwithstanding the obvious lack of candor in the proceeding, have frequently quoted this letter not in reference to the *name*, but to the *office* of bishop, as held among us. For several years their organ has quoted bare sentences from it as a motto. When rebuked for this unquestionable deception, they have replied as follows:—

1. "We give Mr. Wesley's own language. If the letter does not prove that he was opposed to the *office* as well as the name, very well: we give it just as Mr. Wesley wrote it. We do not wish to prove by it anything which the *letter itself* does not prove. We did not intend to make any remarks upon it, had our opponents let us alone."

It is preposterous for these gentlemen to reply that they give Mr. Wesley's words without note or comment, that they speak for themselves, and that their

paper is not responsible for a misapprehension of them. Suppose a band of fanatics should obtain the control of the commonwealth, do away the penal code, fanatically enacting that every crime, however small, should be punished with death, and over their tribunal should inscribe the text, "The soul that sinneth it shall die;" what man in his senses would not say that this was a fearful perversion of God's holy word? The passage would be literally true in its *quotation*, but utterly false in its *application*. If they should assert that it is without comment, would this palliate the abuse? No! for the very tribunal and all its proceedings would be a standing comment on it, speaking a false sense louder than any verbal comment could speak. The illustration holds entirely in this case. Mr. Wesley not only *approved*, but *established* our episcopacy, and provided the very forms of ordination for its perpetuation; but he wished not the word *bishop* to be used, because of the abuse of the word in England. He wrote a letter to Asbury on this point. The seceders set themselves in array against the form of government thus appointed by Wesley, and, finding this letter, (against the *name*, but not against the *thing*,) quote single sentences, and by omitting all explanation, virtually represent by it that Wesley was opposed to the *thing*, not merely the *name*, and this notwithstanding the *English author from whom it is quoted expressly guards against such an abuse*. The whole character of their opposition is a comment on the passage, giving a perfectly false meaning to it. We point the eye of the Christian public to this amazing indication, and say, "Judge ye." Is this honorable? Is it honest? Such chicanery may have a temporary effect

with the uninformed, but sensible and good men will turn from it to blush for truth and religion.

2. "The question is," say our opponents, "did Wesley design to establish an episcopacy possessed of, and wielding, the prerogatives of the present Methodist bishops? This is the true point at issue. He only intended that superintendents should 'preside in the conferences *as moderators*.' These sentiments were in the old Methodist Episcopal Disciplines once, but have long since been left out; so that it is very evident Mr. Wesley never intended to establish *such* an episcopacy as now exists in the Methodist Episcopal Church."

What will the reader think when we assure him that the quotation here given is from the original Minutes prepared for the American Church under Wesley's eye, and that it is but a single member of the sentence, expressing only *one* of the duties of a superintendent; while the omitted members express every other duty which has ever pertained to our episcopal office, except such as are merely incidental? Here is the *whole* passage:—

25th Question: "What is the office of a superintendent?" The answer is: "To ordain superintendents, elders, and deacons; to preside as a moderator in our conferences; to fix the appointments of the preachers, and, in the intervals of conference, to change, suspend, and receive preachers, as necessity may require; and to receive and try appeals."

Wesley had actually vested all these powers, except ordination, in Asbury, before he thus organized them in the church. They remain now precisely as they were, except in incidental matters; and in these there

has been more of an abatement than an increase of powers. (See Hedding on the Discipline.)

3. Our opponents say that "Wesley did not establish such an episcopacy in England." And why? He gives the reasons in his circular letter to the American Church, as we have quoted above. *There* "there were bishops;" here, "there were none." The American Revolution removed his "*scruples*" in respect to this country, but they remained in respect to England. He intended that the English Methodists should abide in the church, and died with this intention. Wesley's views on this subject are so well known that it is useless to delay here.

4. "About the same time that he appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Asbury superintendents in America, he also appointed a superintendent for Scotland. But neither Scotland, nor Canada, nor any other part of the world, save the United States, has such an episcopacy."

Respecting Canada, we reply, that it was then placed under the supervision of our bishops, and therefore needed no such separate appointment. To the assertion respecting Scotland, we give a simple and peremptory denial. Mr. Wesley never ordained *such a superintendent* for Scotland as he appointed for America. Moore, Watson, Jackson, &c., and Wesley himself, in his own Journal, show that he merely ordained preachers to administer the sacraments in Scotland; but this was not that for which Coke was ordained, for *he had been doing this as a presbyter for years*. The Scotch preachers were not ordained *in order to ordain others*, but to administer the sacraments; while Coke was ordained expressly to *ordain others*, that the latter might administer the sacraments. The Scotch ordi-

nations were precisely like those of Vasey and Whatcoat, at the time of Coke's ordination; but Coke's, as we have seen, was entirely distinct. He had received such ordination years before.

And now, looking again at this series of arguments, will we not be acquitted of presumption when we say that we may here make a triumphant stand, surrounded by evidence accumulated and impregnable? That noble ecclesiastical system under which it has pleased God to give us and our families spiritual shelter and sweet fellowship with his saints, and whose efficacy is the wonder of the Christian world, is not—as our opponents would represent—an oppressive *contrivance*, an imposition of the clergy, contrary to the wishes of our great founder, but was legitimately received from his hand as the providential agent of Methodism.

Mr. Wesley's strong repugnance to the mere name of bishop was not expressed till after it had been adopted by our church, or it would probably not have been adopted. Still, the American Church was now a separate organization, and was at perfect liberty to dissent from Mr. Wesley on a matter of mere expediency like the present. The church thought it had good reasons to adopt the name. The American Methodists were mostly of English origin. The people of this country among whom Methodism was most successful were either from England or of immediate English descent, and had been trained to consider episcopacy a wholesome and apostolical government of the church. We approved and had the thing—why not, then, have the name; especially as, without the name, the thing itself would be liable to lose in the eyes of the people its peculiar character, and thereby

fail in that appeal to their long-established opinions which we had a right, both from principle and expediency, to make? The English Establishment had been dissolved in this country by the Revolution. The Protestant Episcopalians had not yet been organized on an independent basis. Our own organization and the ordination of our bishops preceded theirs. The Methodist Church had, therefore, a clear right to present itself to the American public as competent to aid in supplying the place of the dissolved Establishment, having the same essential principles without its peculiar defects.

May not the circumstance of our assuming an episcopal character, nominally as well as really, be considered providential? Episcopacy, both in this country and England, has, since that date, reached an excess of presumption and arrogance. The moderate party, holding the sentiments of the first part of this work, and once declared, by Bishop White, to include a large majority of American Episcopalians, has nearly disappeared. Was it not providential, under these circumstances, that a body of Christians should appear, exceeding every other in zeal and usefulness, and nominally and practically bearing an episcopal character without any of its presumptuous pretensions? Amidst the uncharitable assumptions of prelatical Episcopalians in our own land, the Methodist Episcopal Church stands forth a monument of the laborious and simple episcopacy of the early ages, seen and read of all men; its success, as well as its humility, contrasting it signally with its domineering, but feeblener sister. It has thus practically vindicated episcopacy as an expedient form of ecclesiastical government, and assuredly it needs vindication in these days.

PART III.

GOVERNMENT OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL
CHURCH—ITS STRUCTURE.

CHAPTER I.

LAY REPRESENTATION.

Difference between civil and ecclesiastical organizations—Conformity to our civil system not common in our voluntary secular associations—Nor in religious associations—Nothing in our system requiring it—Its impracticability—Probable results of such a change.

THE chief innovation in the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church, demanded by seceders, is, that it should be *modeled on the representative system of the nation*. Let it be distinctly understood in the outset that the question is not *whether the laity should have a due control of the government of the church*,—we shall show in the sequel that, in the Methodist Episcopal Church, they have this abundantly,—*but whether this control shall be put into the representative form of our civil system?* Without discussing here the abstract right of individuals to such a claim in a compact which they voluntarily entered and can voluntarily leave, and which stipulated no such arrangement when they entered it, we shall consider more particularly the *inexpediency and impracticability of the proposed change*. Whatever may be said of abstract right in the case, it will undoubtedly be admitted that an abstract right may be voluntarily

resigned for a supposed good. This, indeed, is a necessary condition of civil government,—the surrender of certain personal rights for the greater security of others more important. Every man has an abstract right to his own property; but, by becoming a member of the state, he so far resigns this right as to allow his rulers, or a majority of his fellow-citizens, to appropriate a portion of his property by taxation, even against his own opinion of its necessity. Self-preservation is a right of the individual; but civil government may require the sacrifice of life in the public defense. The Methodist polity is based on such a mutual surrender of rights—bearing, however, far more onerously on the ministry than on the laity; and if the principle should be admitted that the proposed change ought to be made because it is a natural right, it is obvious that the most valued features of the system must be at once sacrificed, and Methodism be no more Methodism; for, on this principle, the itinerancy (under God the strength of our system) must cease, it being doubtless an abstract right of the churches to choose their own preachers, leaders, and other officers, and also of the preachers to choose their own fields of labor. Unquestionably the claim of these rights by the people, on the one hand, and the preachers on the other, would reduce us at once to Congregationalism, and extinguish the peculiar efficiency of our cause. The change demanded should, therefore, be considered merely in the light of *expediency*, not of right. If it could be proved more useful than our present arrangement, we are morally obliged to adopt it: if not, we are at perfect liberty to reject it. We believe it to be neither necessary nor desirable—

1. *Because there is no such analogy between our relation to the Methodist Episcopal Church and our relation to the state, as is asserted by the advocates of the proposed change.* "The two governments are totally dissimilar in their *origin*, their *authority*, and their *design*."*

They differ in their *origin*. Our civil government originated with the people. They were necessarily antecedent to their rulers and constitution, the sources of power and change in the government. The government of our church, as has been shown, originated providentially with Wesley and his colleagues. It was *originally* and of *necessity* in their hands, and its subsequent administrators are such by virtue of its provisions as then established. All who have come under it have done so with an understanding of its terms, and a *voluntary* consent to them. It was a mutual compact for certain ends; and those ends have confessedly been attained, and the terms of the compact maintained inviolate.

They differ in their *authority*. "The civil government claims our allegiance from the very circumstance of our being born within its jurisdiction; and long before we are admitted to the right of suffrage, our property, our liberty, and our life itself, depend on the authority of the government. Our obedience to the laws of the country does not depend on our individual

* Bond's Appeal, Baltimore, 1828. This is a document of remarkable ability. It had a decisive influence in settling the disputes of 1828. We are much indebted to it in the present part of this volume. Besides the quotations in arguments 1, 4, 6, and 7, we have condensed much from it in 1 and 7. Our quotations are also much condensed.

consent to them, either before or after we arrive at age. We may consider them grievous and oppressive, but we have no alternative but to obey. We can in no way withdraw from this allegiance but by abandoning our country, and circumstances may place even this out of our power. There arises, therefore, from the nature of our civil obligations, a right to participate in the enactment of the laws by which we are to be governed, as soon as we are deemed capable of exercising this right. But change the nature of these obligations—make membership in the community and obedience to the laws a matter of choice, and the rights which belong to the former relation no longer remain. The rights and the obligations are necessarily reciprocal. Where obedience is necessary, the corresponding rights are inherent; but where the obedience is voluntary, the privileges are conditional, and are in extent no more than are stipulated for in the contract between those who govern and those who are governed. Now this is precisely the relation we sustain to the Methodist Episcopal Church. It did not extend its jurisdiction over us in our infancy, nor until we voluntarily entered within its pale. Our becoming members was a voluntary act, done with a previous knowledge of all the rights we were required to surrender, and the privileges we acquired by the contract. We could not carry with us into this voluntary association any natural rights incompatible with the contract we then entered into; and if the right to participate in the legislative power was no part of the conditions we stipulated for, can we now complain that it is improperly withheld from us? Surely not. If to this we add that there remains to us the right of dissolving the obligations we have volun-

tarily taken upon ourselves, what becomes of the analogy which has been so strangely insisted upon between our civil and ecclesiastical relations? or what of the charge of usurpation and tyranny which has been so repeatedly made against our church?

"The rights which a Methodist possesses, as such, are purely conventional. They are not natural, but acquired rights, and they are determined by the articles of association, contained in our book of Discipline. The church is a *voluntary association, entered into for religious purposes*. Whoever enters into its communion is entitled to all the immunities which the articles of association hold out to him, and no more. If he finds, upon experiment, that the religious advantages he acquires do not compensate him for the sacrifices he is required to make, he has an indefeasible right to withdraw from the community; but he has no right to demand of the church to change her economy for his accommodation."—*Dr. Bond*.

Is it alledged in reply that many enter the church young, or ignorant of the terms of its compact? We answer, It is not responsible for this; its Discipline is made accessible to all; all are urged to read it and judge for themselves. All that can be demanded of the church is, that when such arrive at mature age or better information, she should allow them to dissolve their connection with the compact, if they find it not satisfactory.

Is it further replied that the members of the church have invested property in church edifices, &c., and ought not to be required to sacrifice it? We answer, that in respect to our *free houses*, (and most of them are *free*,) such investments were *not terms of membership*. They

were *voluntary benefactions*, by which the donors acquired *no property* in such free churches. They were erected for any and all who choose to use them; and if they are secured, by the terms of their erection, to the doctrines and usages of Methodism, this also must have been the *voluntary* act of the donors. The original design being fulfilled, no complaint can be just on the part of those who may choose, after such charities, to leave the cause to which they were given. It should be remembered, also, that many who are dead, and many who are not members of the church, have contributed to such *free houses* on the same terms and for the same beneficent purpose. Has a man a right to reclaim a *charity*, which, by being blended with that of others, dead and alive, cannot be returned without frustrating an object of public beneficence, and that, too, when the original terms of the grant are fully adhered to? Such a claim, it is clear, by destroying all grounds of the permanent security of charitable bequests, would soon suppress all similar liberality. Such a claim is no more admissible in this case than in any other benevolent foundation. So much for *free houses*. In respect to the pewed, where, as in New-England, the seceding member has individual property in them, he voluntarily contracted for the terms on which it is held, and, on leaving, can dispose of it to others on the same terms, precisely in the manner that he can dispose of his bank stock, or other property held by contract with public bodies.

Again, they differ in their *design*. "Civil government is instituted to promote the welfare of those included within the compact. Their own interest is the only object to be provided for, and therefore no more

natural rights are to be surrendered than are necessary to secure the object of the association. Such a community is not expected to provide for any without the pale of its jurisdiction ; for those who contribute nothing to the common stock cannot be entitled to receive from the contributions of others.

“ Now, the design of our religious association is essentially different. It is true, we propose to increase the religious advantages of our members ; but then our system is essentially a missionary one. It is intended for those who belong not to the community ; to send the gospel to those who are too poor to pay for it, or too ignorant to appreciate its value, and therefore do not desire it. Is it, then, strange that such an association, formed for purposes so widely different from those which influence us in the organization of civil compacts, should also differ from civil government as much in its structure as it does in its design ? Will not such a religious community be necessarily called upon to make sacrifices of individual rights and advantages which it is not at all necessary to make as members of civil society ? To combine the twofold advantages of providing pastors for the church and missionaries for the world, and fulfill the duties incumbent upon both, the regulations required for such an arrangement being such as chiefly relate to the distribution of ministerial labor, the right of making such regulations has been left to the ministry themselves ; and the people, or laity, have moreover relinquished the right of electing their own pastors, because the exercise of this right was incompatible with the plan of an itinerating missionary ministry.

“ But if this original missionary design called for

important sacrifices on the part of the laity, did it not demand a still more important surrender of *natural rights* on the part of our itinerant ministers? They not only relinquish the right of selecting their own field of labor, but submit to the absolute disposal of a general superintendent, whom they have clothed with authority to send them to any part of the land; and that, too, without any guaranty from those to whom they are sent that they shall be supplied with even the necessities of life.

"We can conceive of no sacrifices of individual rights, comforts, and conveniences, superior to those which our traveling preachers are thus called upon to make, in order to fulfill the primitive missionary design of our institutions."—*Dr. Bond.*

We have thus far shown that the essential difference between our civil and ecclesiastical systems, in respect to their *origin, design*, and the *obedience* they demand, admits of no such analogy between them as requires a conformity of the one to the other.

2. We observe, further, that *such a conformity to the model of our political system is not considered necessary nor desirable in most of the voluntary organizations of a secular character in the land.* They adapt themselves to their designs and emergencies, and are content with such arrangements as will best effect their objects, controlled by such checks and balances as will prevent abuses. *This is precisely the arrangement of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as we shall by and by see.* Nay, our civil government itself presents, in some of its collateral branches, similar deviations from its general model. It maintains an *army and navy.* The power of military command is absolute. The only

maxim of the soldier is to "obey," if it carry him to the cannon's mouth. How would the representative principle work amidst the emergencies of the camp or of the high seas? What propriety is there, then, in this indiscriminate cry of "republicanism," in reference to *voluntary* compacts. We are sure that no American citizens love republicanism better than the members of our church, but this boisterous fallacy has always proved too flimsy to beguile their sound discernment. They believe that, being under the broad shelter of a free civil system, to which all other organizations are responsible, the latter may assume any form that convenience or efficiency may justify without serious danger. Their church system is altogether *militant*, requiring great sacrifices, great energy, and decisive promptness. They believe that they can have such a system, with its pacific and beneficent ends, under the civil system of the land, with as much, nay, more propriety, than the latter can maintain an army or navy, or than pecuniary companies, involving the property of thousands, can deviate from the precise model of the state; but, by the sweeping generalizations of our opponents, we would not only be compelled to abolish our military and naval regimen, but also the authority of the parent in the family, the government of most of our literary institutions, and the discretionary arrangements of most of our business combinations.

8. The conformity to a secular system, demanded by our opponents, is *considered unnecessary and inexpedient by most, if not all ecclesiastical organizations of the country*. All Protestant ones provide, we believe, a suitable popular control of their respective systems, as we shall show ours does; but we know of none that

does not deviate essentially from our civil forms in the exercise of that control ; and, upon a minute comparison, it will be found, we think, that the Methodist system includes as much security of the popular rights as any one of them.

The Protestant Episcopal Church has a representative system, but with such clerical powers as can entirely control it. However unanimous the General Convention may be, they cannot appoint a bishop without the consent of the existing bishops. Our bishops have no voice whatever in the choice of their colleagues. Whatever law may be passed, and with whatever unanimity, by the Protestant Episcopal Convention, the bishops can nullify it by an absolute veto power. Methodist bishops have no veto, nor even vote in making any law whatever, though it should affect themselves alone.

The Presbyterian Church has laymen in its ecclesiastical bodies, but not on the representative system—none being admissible, besides the clergy, except ruling elders, who are elected for life ; and therefore, instead of representing the views of the present church, may represent only those of ten, twenty, or thirty years ago, the date of their election. The Congregationalists certainly do not follow our representative system, but exercise the popular control without limitation ; a mode which, in large bodies, is but anarchy, and, among our Congregational brethren, has been attended with no little distraction. The Quakers have no voting whatever, but follow, in all things, the counsels of seniority and experience, and find no inconvenience in this course.

The Protestant Methodists themselves, after all their

urgency for republican rights in ecclesiastical bodies, have adopted a course which violates the fundamental principle of republican representation by an unequal representation of different classes. They allow as many representatives for their few clergymen as they do for all the hundreds of their laity, and the late seceders have adopted the same aristocratic arrangement. If adopted into our system, it would give to our four thousand preachers the same representation that it would allow to our more than million members!*

This, certainly, is not fair republicanism. If we are to be reproached for judging the plan inexpedient, how much more credit is due to our neighbors, who, with the loftiest pretensions to it, present such a distortion of it? So badly, too, has the innovation worked among our Protestant Methodist brethren, that one of the most eminent leaders of the movement, Rev. A. Shinn, wrote an admonitory letter to the leaders of the late secession on the subject, declaring that "they have had no little difficulty in keeping their denomination from being scattered to the winds by a loose and deplorable spirit of anarchy." Although he wishes popular representation in the General Conference, and thinks that, in a modified form, it might succeed in the Annual Conference, yet he admits fully its mischievous effects in his own church. Referring to a modification of it, which he attempted to introduce in the convention in 1830, he says: "I was overruled; and from that day until now the evidence has been constant and uniform, that

* The reader will notice, here and elsewhere, that these pages were written before the late division of the church. The argument is not, however, affected by this fact.



the love of power in the sovereign people as regularly turns a deaf ear to argument, as does the love of power in bishops or itinerant ministers."* The project has certainly failed, after most deplorable strife for its introduction.

In the Protestant Episcopal Church bishops have the sole right of admitting persons to membership in the church, by confirmation. In the Methodist Episcopal Church no one can be admitted without six months' probation, and then by recommendation of a lay officer, and an examination before the church.

In the Protestant Episcopal Church the expulsion of a member is solely with the clergyman, and there is no appeal but to the bishop. In the Methodist Episcopal Church no member can be expelled but after trial by the church, or a committee of the church, and has then an appeal to the quarterly conference, chiefly composed of lay officers; while in the Presbyterian Church the preacher and ruling elder (appointed for life) alone try and expel members; and in the Congregational, juries, as in secular courts, are not allowed, and however intense the public excitement in any given case, the whole society have the right of trying and punishing the accused; a mode certainly liable to

* See his letter in the "True Wesleyan," February 18, 1843. He further says in this letter, that "the love of power is a deep disease in human nature, and it is not confined to any one order of men. The sovereign people are as proud of their sovereignty as a monarch upon his throne; and the lawless rage of a mob is no better than that of an individual tyrant. If you put all power into the democratic body, they will soon show themselves 'many masters;' and a destructive anarchy will be as great a traitor to the Redeemer as a domineering hierarchy." Rather aristocratic sentiments, certainly, for a Methodist seceder.

serious objections, and which would be most calamitous in civil governments.

In the Presbyterian Church, candidates for the ministry are admitted to the office by the presbytery; and in the Congregational, the associations of the clergy alone admit them; while, in the Methodist Episcopal Church, the people make the ministry, and, as we shall show hereafter, by a process remarkably minute.

In most, if not all Protestant churches, the clergy stipulate with the people for their salaries, and can prosecute them at law. In the Methodist Episcopal Church they can rely only on the *voluntary contributions* of the people, and have no legal right for the supply of any deficiency in their allowance.

We might extend these comparisons further, but they are sufficient to show that our own church admits a popular influence not surpassed in the most important respects by any other. We have not made these comparisons to disparage our brethren of other sects. Most of the points we have referred to in their respective systems are not objectionable, if counterbalanced by suitable checks. They prove fully our position, that, though these sects may all admit a sufficient popular control, it is not exercised on the plan of our representative system. They, in common with the Methodist Episcopal Church, do not deem this plan necessary or expedient in religious and voluntary organizations.

4. *There is nothing in our system which requires or justifies the proposed change.* When such a revolution is demanded it is proper to inquire, Where is the necessity of it? What evil is it to remedy?

"Is it intended to alter our articles of religion? These have not been questioned by our disaffected members.

"Are the lay members of the conference to effect any change in our moral discipline? With this, also, our opponents have publicly expressed their satisfaction. In fact, the church did not *make* it, and, therefore, must not alter it. It is none other than that which is prescribed by the gospel itself.

"Now there remains nothing more in our economy, in reference to the laity, except those prudential regulations which have been deemed necessary to enable the pastors of the church to execute and enforce the discipline. Of these regulations, the principal complaint has been against class-meeting, as a term of membership. The class-meeting, we believe, the membership are not disposed to abolish. On the contrary, the great majority of the church consider it an indispensable provision while we retain an itinerant ministry.

"Is it, then, to legislate on the temporal concerns of the church that laymen are necessary in its business bodies?

"The *General Conference*, the highest body in our system, have never attempted to interfere authoritatively in our temporal matters. The regulations they have made on this subject have been only recommendatory. *The General Conference have never considered themselves authorized to levy taxes upon the laity, or to make any pecuniary contribution a condition of membership in the church.*"—*Dr. Bond.*

Nine-tenths of the business of the General Conference relates to the preachers alone, and it has expressly declared that it has no properly *legislative* powers. Though it makes rules and regulations for its great work, it pretends to do nothing more in this respect

than scripturally pertains to the ministerial office. In its Report on the subject, in 1828, it says :—

“ We arrogate no authority to enact any laws of our own, either of moral or of civil force. Our commission is to preach the gospel, and to enforce the moral discipline, established by the one Lawgiver, by those spiritual powers vested in us as subordinate pastors, who watch over souls as they that must give account to the chief Shepherd. We claim no strictly legislative powers, although we grant the terms ‘legislature’ and ‘legislative’ have been sometimes used even among ourselves. In a proper sense, however, they are not strictly applicable to our General Conference. A mistake on this point has probably been the source of much erroneous reasoning, and of some consequent dissatisfaction. *Did we claim any authority to enact laws to affect either life or limb, to touch the persons or to tax the property of our members, they ought, unquestionably, to be directly represented among us.* But they know we do not. We certainly, then, exercise no civil legislation. As to the moral code, we are subject, equally with themselves, to one only Lord. We have no power to add to, to take from, to alter, or to modify a single item of his statutes. Whether laymen or ministers be the authorized expounders and administrators of those laws, we can confidently rely on the good Christian sense of the great body of our brethren to judge. These well know, also, that whatever expositions of them we apply to others, the same are applied equally to ourselves, and, in some instances, with peculiar strictness.”

So much for the General Conference.

The *Annual Conference* is the next body in our sys-

tem. Representation is certainly not necessary here, for its business, excepting a few *judicial* items, relating alone to traveling and local preachers, is *entirely executive*, and concerns only the preachers. No rule or regulation can be made by it, except such as is merely advisory. The appointments of the preachers are not a part of its business; they are only announced in it.

The third body, the *Quarterly Conference*, which has most control of the pecuniary and local business of the churches, is almost entirely composed of laymen. An objection to the manner of their appointment we shall notice in the sequel.

Is it objected here that there ought to be a combination of laymen with clergymen in the business bodies of the church, however limited may be the functions of these bodies, because history records the great abuse of clerical power; as, for instance, in the Papal system? We reply, that they thus control the one which most affects their interests, the Quarterly Conference, and of the others have a full controlling power in *another form*. There is not the remotest relation between the historical instances referred to and our economy. They grew out of the connection of the church with civil power, and its consequent release from the popular will. Our ministry is dependent utterly on the *voluntary support* of the people. "We thereby have over them a *positive and absolute control*; for, whenever their flocks shall withdraw their support, the preachers will be under the necessity of abandoning their present pastoral relation, and of betaking themselves to some secular occupation. These contributions depend, for their continuance, on the *affection* which the laity bear to their pastors. There

can, therefore, be no danger of these pastors attempting to exercise any tyrannical authority over them.”—*Dr. Bond.*

It does, then, appear, that the revolution in our polity, so urgently demanded by seceders, is almost without an object. There is certainly none sufficient to justify the risk of the change, especially when it is considered that the system is already amply controlled by the people in another manner.

5. *This plan would be impracticable on account of its pecuniary embarrassments.*

“Suppose the delegates elected; the next question to be asked is, Who is to bear their traveling expenses to and from the conference—the delegate, or his constituents? And how are they to be provided for during the session? If it be answered that their expenses will be borne as those of the traveling preachers are now provided for, we reply, that the case of the one kind of delegates is not at all similar to that of the other. In the first place, the preachers, on their road to and from the conference, labor all the way in their vocation. They are everywhere received and entertained as missionaries—as a kind of common property, in which every member of their church has an equal interest. The preacher, on his part, is accustomed to be entertained by the membership, without making any pecuniary compensation. He has only to preach to them, and to pray with them, and they consider themselves amply remunerated. Now it will not be so with the lay delegates. They must travel as other laymen do. They will not condescend to ask for accommodations of strangers, but will pay for them at the public houses.


“In the second place, we know that some difficulty has been always experienced in providing for the preachers at the General Conference; and hence, it may be fairly questioned whether the members would accommodate the lay delegates at all. And, on the other hand, as these delegates will not have been accustomed to receive gratuitous entertainment of strangers, they will not feel free to receive two or three months’ board for nothing. If this should turn out to be the case, then we must add the expenses of boarding, lodging, &c., to the expenses of the delegate; and, without any allowance for the loss of time, or for the injury which his business will sustain by the negligence or improvidence of those who superintend his affairs while he is from home, the expenses of a delegate will be no inconsiderable sum.

“We think it will be impossible for the distant sections of our church to find men who are able to meet these expenses, and give the time which the duties of a delegate will necessarily require. They cannot be found among any of those whose personal attention is necessary to their callings in life. The farmer, the merchant, the lawyer, the physician, and the tradesman cannot spare the time, even if they could afford the expense; and the idle may not furnish the very best materials for representatives to the church legislature. If, however, men of wealth and leisure can be everywhere found, as willing as they are able, to go at their own expense, it would become a question, of no ordinary interest to the Methodists, whether they ought to adopt a system of government which would make rich men absolutely necessary to them, or which would exclude from their councils the brethren of less fortune,

though, possibly, possessed of better gifts and more experience.

“We think it must be obvious, that, before the Methodists can have a lay representation, they must provide funds to meet, at least, the expenses of the delegates, if not to make them some compensation for their loss of time. To raise these funds in some districts will be utterly impossible, for they are not able to pay their preachers the small stipends to which they are entitled. It is well known that in many, if not most of the conferences, such is the amount of deficiencies in the circuits, that, after all the collections from the other circuits and stations are brought into conference, the preachers seldom have been able to divide among those who are deficient more than fifty cents in the dollar. We are at a loss to know how those circuits which cannot pay their preachers are to raise the money to pay lay delegates. But this is not all. The remote districts, many of which are among those that are least able to pay their delegates, will have to incur much greater expense than those which are located nearer the General Conference, as their delegates will have further to travel. This would not only be oppressive, but unjust. As the representation is intended for the common benefit, no one part of the membership ought to pay more than another.

“From these considerations, it will appear that the representatives must be paid out of some common fund, to be provided by the whole church; and further, that this fund, as it is intended to meet expenses that must *certainly* accrue, cannot be looked for from sources that are uncertain, and, therefore, must not depend upon the voluntary contributions of the members of the church.



It can, then, only be raised by direct *taxation*; and to levy this tax will be one of the many new powers which must be given to the General Conference, when constituted as the seceders would have it. To levy a tax, without having the power to enforce the collection of it, would be an absurdity; and I can see but one means of enforcing the collection, and that will be, to turn those out of the church who do not comply with the requisition. Here, then, will be a new condition of membership; and we hope there are few of us who would consent to hold our membership upon any *pecuniary* condition whatever. But, if we do consent to this tax, how shall it be levied? Will it be by an equal assessment on property? or will it be a poll tax? The first would be vexatious, and give rise to endless disputes; and the other would be both unjust and oppressive. In short, look at this Utopian scheme on whatever side you will, if you only bring it near enough to see it in its details, it will appear equally absurd and impracticable.

“It may be alledged, however, that if each electoral district be allowed to raise, by subscription, the amount necessary to pay their own delegate, those who do not send delegates will have no right to complain if others, more liberal, should avail themselves of the privilege. We reply, that this would be true in reference to those who had the means, and declined to avail themselves of the advantages accorded to them; but will not apply to those who cannot send delegates for want of the means. These would have a right to complain; not, indeed, because others enjoyed a blessing in which they could not participate, but because their former situation was made worse by the advantages accorded to their

wealthier brethren. This will be obvious, from the following considerations : The regulations, by which the whole church is governed, are made by those who have no local or fixed residence ; but they necessarily acquire a knowledge of the local circumstances, and particular necessities of our membership, in the different sections of the United States. Now, if the interests of the laity were confided to a partial representation, chiefly, if not entirely, composed of delegates from the circuits and stations in the vicinity of the General Conference, the situation of those sections which could not be represented by their own delegates would be very materially altered for the worse. They will then be legislated for, not only by those who are in no way responsible to them, but by those who do not even know them, and, of consequence, are totally unacquainted with their sentiments or their circumstances. So far, then, from enjoying new privileges by the contemplated changes in our ecclesiastical polity, they would be robbed of the equal advantages which they now enjoy. It is easy to foresee, without pretending to any extraordinary sagacity, that such a state of things would necessarily bring about a dismemberment of our ecclesiastical union. The more remote annual conference districts, not being able to send representatives to the general conferences, where the other districts were represented, would withdraw from the confederacy and institute a legislature of their own, more conveniently located."—*Dr. Bond.*

6. But suppose all these difficulties surmounted, it would still be *impossible fully to adopt the plan*. According to the republican principle that representation should be apportioned to numbers, the change would

absolutely be impracticable among us unless the ministry should be virtually excluded from the representative body. Our traveling ministers are now four thousand; the membership 1,068,000. If, then, we should have but one representative to a thousand, it would give us four for all the clergy; that is, one for every eight conferences! virtually none at all; while, for the laity, there would be one thousand and sixty-eight! and this, too, in a body nine-tenths of whose business relate only to the clergy. And, certainly, the number cannot be increased to accommodate the clergy, for, even at the above reduced rate, the body would be unmanageably large; and if, on the other hand, it should be reduced still more, to render it more manageable, the clerical representation must be entirely cut off!

7. If, however, by violating a fundamental principle of republican representation, we should allow as many clergymen as laymen in the representative body,—the plan adopted by our seceding brethren,—while, as we have already shown, there is no necessity for such an arrangement, *it would be productive of incalculable evils to the church.* Our present representation is one for every twenty-one preachers, and affords about one hundred and ninety members to the General Conference. If we reduce this number one-half, to make room for the lay delegation, it will give the preachers one representative for every forty-two; and, estimating two preachers to a circuit, it will take twenty-one circuits to send one itinerant delegate. As the lay representation is to be equal, it will take the same number of circuits to send one lay delegate. Now, how are these lay delegates to be chosen? No candidate can

be known personally to one in several hundreds of the Methodists on the twenty-one circuits which form his electoral district; and, if they know him not, how will they be fit to judge of his qualifications?

“To obviate this difficulty in the election of delegates by the members immediately, it will be necessary to institute an electoral college, composed of electors chosen in each circuit separately, who shall meet and choose a representative for the General Conference. These electors can only be chosen by the members in the class-meetings, for it will not be possible to assemble them together at one place, in order to take their votes. It will be a consequence, growing out of this arrangement, that each of the candidates for the honor of representing us in the General Conference will have his elector in every circuit composing the district, who will be pledged to vote for said candidate in the event of his being placed in the electoral college. We have now the preliminary arrangements for the combat, and the issue will be easily foreseen. The several candidates for the electoral college must of course visit the different class-meetings in the circuit, to set forth the pretensions and superior qualifications of the person whom he has been led to prefer as a representative to the church legislature. These claims may at first be modestly set forth, but presently opposition will enlist and warm his feelings. As the time of the election draws nearer, and the contest becomes doubtful, pride and partisan zeal will enter the lists. The disgrace and mortification of defeat, the glory and triumph of victory, urge on the combatants; and the ‘on, brethren, on,’ of the Rev. Mr. Snethen,* will everywhere be

* See Mutual Rights, vol. iii, p. 248.

heard, animating the competitors, and encouraging the contest. The feelings of the members will soon catch the kindling flame. Personal friendship for the candidates, or the interest they may feel for the measures they severally propose to carry in the General Conference, cannot fail of effect. Parties and caucuses will be formed, which will necessarily alienate their affections from each other. Brotherly love no longer continuing, strife and envy, evil speaking and slander, will take the place of those fruits of the Spirit—peace, long-suffering, and meekness, and of that humility which has so long taught us each to esteem the other better than himself. From such scenes the more pious, humble, and retiring, though obviously the most competent part of the membership, will seek to hide themselves, and mourn over calamities they cannot control; while the froward and assuming, the vain and the self-conceited, will be brought forward, and obtain, by their party zeal and desire of distinction, the suffrages of their brethren. Beloved reader, brother in Christ, I am no prophet, neither the son of a prophet; but I venture to predict, without the spirit of prophecy, that this is but a very faint representation of the scenes which will certainly follow the changes which you are urged to effect in the government of the Methodist Church. Our class-meetings, heretofore blessed to us as a peculiar privilege, where we have been accustomed to speak and to think only of spiritual things, will then become, over this whole continent, so many arenas for electioneering, strife, and contention; where brother will seek to traduce and misrepresent brother, in order to lessen his influence in an approaching election; and where feuds and personal enmities will be

engendered, fearful in their consequences, and interminable in their duration. I care not whether elections in our church be for preachers, class-leaders, or delegates to the General Conference or the annual conferences; only make them of sufficient importance to excite competition, and awaken that desire for distinction which finds a place in every human bosom until it is cast out by perfect love, and the same destructive consequences will inevitably follow so long as man continues what he is—a weak and fallible being.”
—*Dr. Bond.*

According to the plan actually adopted by the seceding Methodists, these dangerous liabilities are increased *four or five fold*, for they have not only an election once in *four* years for the General Conference, but *every* year for the annual conference, besides the elections of appointing-committees, class-leaders, &c., keeping up a constant agitation in all departments of the church. Well may they, as Mr. Shinn declares, have “difficulty in keeping their denomination from being scattered to the winds by a loose and deplorable spirit of anarchy!” And if this arrangement could succeed tolerably with their small numbers, yet how would it operate among our vast membership?

Thus, then, it is manifest that this demand for *republican forms* in our economy is not justified by any analogy between the church and the state in their *authority*, their *origin*, or *design*—nor by the example of most voluntary organizations of a *secular character* in the land—nor by the example of *other churches*—nor by any important *want* or *liability* in our present system;—that it has insurmountable *pecuniary difficulties*—that, from the proportion of the clergy to the

laity, it would be *absolutely impracticable* on the true republican principle—and that, even on an *aristocratic plan* of disproportionate representation, it would be attended with *processes, agitations, and strifes*, in our large body, which would be utterly incompatible with the pacific character of religious institutions, and would probably prove destructive to our cause.

CHAPTER II.

ITINERANCY.

Recommended by Scriptural example—Comports with the design of the Christian ministry—Its influence and results.

WE now proceed to examine our economy as it is, and to show that it is actually under a sufficient popular control in another form. In our brief limits we cannot, of course, notice all those features of it which are condemned by seceders. We shall, therefore, in the following observations, keep in view the chief one, namely, its episcopacy; remarking here, however, *that the design and checks which justify and restrain this apply to the others also*. If they are found sufficient in this instance, they, of course, will not be deemed inadequate in subordinate cases.

With this preliminary remark, three things are to be considered in forming a just idea of the Methodist economy: first, its *chief object*; second, its *chief power*; third, its *appropriate checks or balances*.

First. Its chief design (subordinate to its spiritual ends) is the maintenance of *itinerancy* in the ministry. *This is its stamped feature*. Nothing pertaining to it

is more prized by Methodists. Even in the dense population of England, among the old and well-established societies of London and Liverpool, the preachers are required to exchange every sabbath, and to remove every two or three years. Some of the reasons for this arrangement can only be referred to here.

1. It is recommended by Scriptural example. The fathers of our church speak thus on this point: "The following portions of the word of God are pointed in support of the itinerant plan for the propagation of the gospel; which plan renders most of the regulations of the General and Annual Conferences essential to the existence of our united society: Matt. x, 5-11, 'These twelve [apostles] Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. And into *whatsoever city or town* ye shall enter, inquire,' &c. Matt. xxii, 8-10, 'Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye, therefore, into *the highways, and as many as ye shall find*, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into *the highways*,' &c. Matt. xxviii, 19, 'Go ye, therefore, and *teach all nations*,' be as extensively useful as possible. Mark vi, 7-12, 'And he calleth unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two, . . . and commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, *save a staff only*. . . . And he said unto them, *In what place soever* ye enter into a house, there abide, till ye *depart* from that place. . . . And *they went out*, and preached that men should repent.' Luke x, 1-9, 'After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two

and two before his face *into every city and place*, whither he himself would come. . . . And into *whatsoever house* ye enter,' says our Lord to them, 'first say, Peace be to this house. . . . And into *whatsoever city* ye enter and they receive you, say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.' Luke xiv, 23, 'And the Lord said unto the servant, *Go out into the highways and hedges*, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.' Acts viii, 4, 'They that were scattered abroad *went everywhere* preaching the word.' Acts viii, 40, 'Philip . . . preached *in all the cities*, till he came to Cæsarea.' Acts xvi, 36, 'Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go *again* and visit our brethren *in every city* where we have preached the word of the Lord,' &c. . . . *Timothy and Titus were traveling bishops*. In short, every candid person, who is thoroughly acquainted with the New Testament, must allow, that whatever excellences other plans may have, *this* is the primitive and *apostolic* plan. But we would by no means speak with disrespect of the faithful *located* ministers of any church. We doubt not but, from the nature and circumstances of things, there must have been many located ministers in the primitive churches; and we must acknowledge, with gratitude to God, that the *located* brethren in our church are truly useful, and of considerable consequence, in their respective stations. But, on the other hand, we are so conscious of the vast importance of the *traveling plan*, that we are determined, through the grace of God, to support it to the utmost of our power; nor will any plea which can possibly be urged, however plausible it may appear, or under whatever name proposed, induce us to make the least sacrifice in this respect, or, by the introduction of any nov-

erty, to run the least hazard of wounding *that plan* which God has so wonderfully owned, and which is so perfectly consistent with the apostolic and primitive practice.”—*Notes to Discipline of 1796*.

2. It comports with the design of the Christian ministry. Christianity was not designed to be, like Judaism, a local system, but aggressive, until it should be universal. The missionary idea should not be incidental, as it is in the systems of most modern churches—dependent on casual impulses and occasional liberality, but should be incorporated into the very constitution of the ministry—its ostensible characteristic. Such was the meaning of the divine commission, “Go ye into all the world.” Such was the character of the primitive ministry during its itinerant operations. The truth broke forth on the right and on the left, till it overspread and outspread the Roman empire. When it pleased God to raise up Wesley, only about two or three of even incidental forms of aggressive action were to be found in the Protestant churches. He was providentially led to introduce an arrangement which should put Protestant lands themselves under a great system of missionary operations—itinerant circles of ministerial labor, which, while they conveyed the gospel to the millions of domestic heathen who had scarcely been affected by the existing localized system, should also send forth tangents of evangelic light to the millions abroad.

3. It has an inestimable influence on the ministry itself. It is an heroic training which the greatest military captains might applaud. We need not enlarge here. Any reflecting mind must perceive that such a system as the Methodist itinerancy is remarkably adapt-

ed, as a vehicle, for the enthusiastic energy which characterizes fervid and highly devotional minds, and is equally fitted to keep alive that energy. It is also well suited to preclude men of false character, for it is almost entirely a system of sacrifice. By its access to all classes, it affords an invaluable knowledge of human nature; by its constant exercise, it produces athletic frames and energetic temperaments; by its incessant labors, an exclusive devotedness to one work; by its frequent changes, a pilgrim spirit. Most of its laborers may say, with their great poet,—

“No foot of land do I possess,
No cottage in this wilderness,
A poor wayfaring man;
I lodge awhile in tents below,
And gladly wander to and fro,
Till I my Canaan gain.”

This effect the world witnesses. Do we assert too much when we say, that for one hundred years the Methodist ministry, though mostly uneducated, have transcended in labors, in results, and in conservative adherence to their great principles, any other body of men engaged in moral labor on the earth?

4. It distributes in turn, to most of the societies, the various talents of the ministry. This is an important consideration to those who have witnessed its operation, but it can only be alluded to here. Many men of fervid spirit and deep piety have little talent for disciplining the church. Their discourses are chiefly hortative; they are instrumental in great revivals and additions to the membership. It is obvious that such talents need a rapid distribution. The soul must not

only be converted, but *trained* in piety. By an itinerant system such men are changed from position to position, arousing dull churches, breaking up new ground, invading and reclaiming ungodly neighborhoods. By the same system prudent men, with talents for instructing and edifying the converted masses, follow the former, gathering up and securing the fruits of their labors. Some pastors are addicted chiefly to experimental and practical preaching, others to the illustration and defense of doctrinal truth. Some are most effectual in the social services and in pastoral labors, others in the ministrations of the pulpit. Some have ability only for spiritual labors, others are skillful in managing and invigorating the fiscal resources of the church, in erecting new chapels, and promoting the benevolent enterprises of the times. Now it is clear that the frequent distribution of these various gifts, wisely adapted to the local wants of the various churches, must be an extraordinary cause of energy and success, and such we shall by and by see has actually been its effect.

5. It produces a sentiment of unity throughout the church. In no sect is there more co-operation—more of the *esprit du corps*. Scarcely is a church erected, or any important measure attempted, that does not enlist the common sympathy of the body; and this results, to a great extent, from our having pastors who, by frequent changes, become individually common to us all.

6. By it one preacher can supply a *plurality* of societies. This is one of its capital advantages. In a sparse population, a single circuit sometimes takes in ten or twenty appointments. Methodism has thus supplied our frontier for fifty years with the gospel. The

usual stationary ministries wait for the *call of the people*, except in their collateral missionary labors: the Methodist ministry goes forth *to call the people*. This is one of its strongest points of contrast. It is *the missionary church*. Its adaptation in this respect to our own country is worthy of remark. While the great moral revolution of Methodism was going on across the Atlantic, the greatest political revolution of modern times was in process on our own continent; and when we contemplate the new adaptations of religious action which were evolved by the former, can we resist the conviction that there was a providential relation between the two events?—that they were not only coincident in time, but also in purpose? While Wesley and his co-laborers were reviving Christianity there, Washington and his compatriots were reviving liberty here. It was the American Revolution that led to the development of the resources of this vast country, and rendered it the assembling-place of all kindreds, tongues, and people; and Methodism commenced its operation sufficiently early to be in mature vigor by the time that the great movement of the civilized world toward the west began. It seems to have been divinely adapted to this emergency of our country. If we may judge from the result, it was raised up by Providence more in reference to the new than to the old world. Its peculiar measures were strikingly suited to the circumstances of the country, while those of every other contemporary sect were as strikingly unadapted to them. The then usual process of a long preparatory training for the ministry could not at all consist with the rapidly increasing wants of the country. The usual plan of local labor, limited to a single congregation or to a

parish, was inadequate to the wants of Great Britain at that time; but much more so to those of the new continent. That extraordinary conception of Wesley, an itinerant ministry, met, in the only manner possible, the circumstances of the latter. No one can estimate what would have been the probable result of that rapid advancement which the population of the United States was making beyond the customary provisions for religious instruction, had not this novel plan met the emergency. Much of what was then our frontier, but since has become the most important states of the Union, would have passed through the forming period of its character destitute, to a great extent, of the influence of Christian institutions; but the Methodist itinerancy has borne the cross, not only in the midst, but in the van, of the hosts of emigration. Methodist itinerants are found, with their horses and saddlebags, threading the trail of the savage, cheering and blessing with their visits the loneliest cottage on the furthest frontier. They have gone to the aboriginal tribes, and have gathered into the pale of the church more of the children of the forest than any other sect. They have scaled the Rocky Mountains, and are building up Christianity and civilization on the shores of the Columbia. They are hastening down toward the capital of Montezuma; while, through the length and breadth of our older states, they have been spreading a healthful influence which has affected all classes, so that their cause includes not only a larger aggregate population than any other sect, but especially a larger proportion of those classes whose moral elevation is the most difficult and the most important—the savage, the slave, the free colored man, and the lower classes generally.

Dr. Baird, (a Presbyterian,) in his late invaluable work on Religion in America, speaking of difficult portions of our moral field, exclaims: "Blessed be God, there is a way, as I shall show hereafter, by which some of the evils here spoken of may be mitigated; and that is, by the system of itinerant preaching employed in the United States so extensively and usefully by the Methodists." And again he says: "It has been said, with truth, that the Methodist Church is, in its very structure, emphatically missionary; and it is an inexpressible blessing that it is so, as the United States strikingly prove. The whole country is embraced by one General Conference; it is again subdivided into thirty-two annual conferences, each including a large extent of country, and divided into districts. Each district comprehends several circuits, and within each circuit there are from five or six to above twenty preaching places. Ordinarily, as often as once in a fortnight, a circuit preacher conducts a regular service at each of these preaching places, whether it be a church, school-room, or a dwelling-house. In the largest towns and villages such services are held on the sabbath, and on a week-day or evening in other places; and thus the gospel is carried into thousands of remote spots in which it never would be preached upon the plan of having a permanent clergy, planted in particular districts and parishes. It was a remark, I believe, of the celebrated Dr. Witherspoon, that 'he needed no other evidence that the Rev. John Wesley was a great man, than what the system of itinerating preaching presented to his mind, and of which that wonderful man was the author.' The observation was a just one. It is a system of vast importance in every

point of view, capable of being made to send its ramifications into almost every corner of the country, and to carry the glad tidings of salvation into the most remote and secluded settlements, as well as to the more accessible and populous towns and neighborhoods."

7. It provides for poor churches. At least *one-third* of our societies do not afford a competent support; yet we supply them with preachers, and by annual or biennial changes these preachers are replaced, and the disadvantages of such places relieved, by being shared among them. By any other plan, such societies must be abandoned. Do away the itinerancy, and Methodism *would at once contract, by at least one-third, its sphere of labor, and lose nine-tenths of its moral power.* This, under God, is the great secret of its triumphs. Pages could be written on the subject.

8. This system has been found by experiment not only practicable, and, in connection with our classes and other means, perfectly adapted to the pastoral and other wants of our densest communities as well as the wilderness, but also the most successful one yet adopted by Protestant Christendom. We would not speak of it with sectarian gratulation, but in proof of our position, and in humble gratitude to the great Head of the church, who, in his mercy, has made us "a peculiar people," "which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God."

Methodism is but little more than a century old in England. Other dissenting bodies were in operation centuries before it, yet it has outstripped every one of them in the number of its societies and its pecuniary efforts for the salvation of the heathen. The substance of a report, showing the dissenting force arrayed against

Puseyism, has been republished in the American religious papers. (See Christian Intelligencer, February 1844.) It gives to the Methodists in England and Ireland a number of societies equal to about half of all the dissenting societies in England and Wales. They are stated at four thousand in England and Ireland the Baptists in England and Ireland at one thousand six hundred and seventy-six; Independents in England and Wales, two thousand three hundred and sixteen churches; Presbyterians, (Orthodox,) in England, on hundred and twenty churches, &c. The dissenting aggregate is stated at about eight thousand. This report is irregular, in excepting from its statistics of the Methodists their numerous societies in Wales and Scotland; while it also excepts the Baptists in the same places, and the Independents and Presbyterians in Ireland. We give it as it is. It is sufficient to show the remarkable superiority of the Methodist economy.

Only about sixty years have yet passed since the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, and but about seventy-five since the arrival of the first Methodist itinerant. Other evangelical bodies had been operating here more than a century, and yet the Methodist Episcopal Church, exclusive of several other classes of Methodists, exceeds by nearly one-half any other Protestant sect of the country. The Baptists are the next in numbers—the Baptist Register states their present communicants at 682,200. The last Methodist Minutes (1844) report our numbers at 1,068,525 members, 4,000 preachers and 7,700 local preachers. As an evidence of the missionary character of our system, it ought to be stated that this estimate includes 8,879 Indians and 128,411

colored people, and that about 90,000 of the latter are in our missions to the slaves. Its success still advances. The increase last year alone was 154,000, (and of this increase eight hundred were Indians, and twenty thousand colored people,) more than twice as large as the whole Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States; a sister church, which has our doctrines and episcopacy without our itinerancy.*

Let us take a local example of its success, and let it be selected from its most difficult field, New-England, where it has had a perpetual conflict with the prevalent theology and views of ecclesiastical government. A series of careful statistical articles have been published, comparing the per centage of our increase with that of the whole population of New-England. The population of

New-England increased, from 1800 to 1810,	19½	per cent.
Methodism	"	" 92 "
New-England increased, from 1810 to 1820,	12½	"
Methodism	"	" 58 "
New-England increased, from 1820 to 1830,	17½	"
Methodism	"	" 98½ "
New-England increased, from 1830 to 1840,	14	"
Methodism	"	" 85 "

* Dr. Dixon, late president of the Wesleyan Conference, England, says: "Taking into account the present numbers and position of the American Methodist Episcopal Church; the wide area of the United States; the rapidly increasing population of the country; the adaptation of their system to meet the wants of a scattered and new population; and, above all, the completeness of their church order, which is evidently looked upon with affectionate and loyal veneration on the part of the people, we are furnished with moral *data* for the conclusion, that the American Methodist Church must, in the ordinary course of things, become one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, Protestant body in the world."

The per centage of our increase, it will be seen, is far in advance of that of the general population. If we compare our numbers with the whole population, we discover a rapidly increasing ratio. Thus, beginning ten years after our origin, in

1800 there was one Methodist in every 211 of the whole population.

1810	"	"	131	"
1820	"	"	94	"
1830	"	"	56	"
1840	"	"	34	"

These ratios we obtain without including the thousands of New-England Methodists comprehended in the New-York and Troy Conferences. We have estimated the latter, for 1840, at twenty-two thousand, and we are certain that this estimate is short of the truth. Including these, our ratio, for 1840, will be one in twenty-five. Thus, in forty years, our ratio to the whole population of New-England has advanced from one in two hundred and eleven to one in twenty-five, exhibiting a rapid gain on the general population.

The Methodist membership in New-England has more than doubled every twelve years since 1796.

Compare now these local estimates with the numbers of other sects. Our Congregational brethren have been in the field more than two hundred years, four times as long as ourselves. They possessed it wholly a large portion of the time. Besides the advantage of pre-possessing the ground, they have had numerous auxiliary means (peculiar to themselves) of not only retaining their original strength, but of extending it with the increase of population. From the minutes of their general associations for the different New-

England states, (mostly of 1841, a year later than our own statistics, as given above,) we compile the following estimates of communicants :—

Connecticut . . .	35,688	Maine	17,338
Massachusetts . .	57,563	Vermont	22,666
New-Hampshire . .	17,581		
Rhode Island . . .	2,577	Total	153,413

The total of Methodist members which we have given New-England, for 1840, is eighty-seven thousand. Compared with the aggregate returns of the Congregationalists, it gives us considerably more than one-half their number, enrolled in less than one-fifth their time. In some of the New-England states our aggregate exceeds theirs. We have no means of ascertaining the per centage of their increase, but the above statements show that it must be considerably short of our own.

Our Baptist brethren are a numerous and successful denomination in New-England. Their first church was established by Roger Williams in 1639, about one hundred and fifty years before Jesse Lee's visit to New-England. By the time of his visit they were twenty thousand strong. The Baptist Memorial *extra*, (p. 22,) for 1842, gives the following returns from each of the New-England states for 1840 :—

Maine	20,490	Massachusetts . . .	26,311
Vermont	11,101	Rhode Island	5,962
Connecticut	11,725		
New-Hampshire . . .	9,557	Total	85,146

Our membership for 1840 being eighty-seven thousand, gives us nearly two thousand majority over the

Baptists, though we have been in the field but one-fourth of their time.

The above two denominations are leading ones in New-England. They are far in advance of any others with which we might institute further comparisons, and are therefore sufficient for our purpose.

The foregoing calculations afford the following result:—*That the Methodist Church is second in New-England in numbers, and first in progress.*

There is an apparent invidiousness in such comparisons, but we have made them with no such feeling. They are presented as matters of fact, illustrative of our actual progress. While the rapidity of our advancement is an occasion of undisguised congratulation and gratitude, we trust we should rejoice were that of our sister churches a hundred-fold greater than it is.

We have said that our itinerant arrangement, though itself a system of domestic missionary circles, sends forth tangents of evangelic influence to the foreign world. The Wesleyan Methodists are unsurpassed in their zeal for foreign missions. According to a table in the London Missionary Register for 1842, their annual missionary contributions are greater than those of any other benevolent society whatever in Protestant Christendom, except the British and Foreign Bible Society and the English Church Missionary Society. Besides their centenary contribution of a million dollars, they have recently raised above \$500,000 yearly for missions. Their missionary communicants *are more numerous than the missionary communicants of all the other European Protestant churches put together.**

* Besides these and other numerous benevolent efforts, the

The Methodist Missionary Society in the United States extends its labors to Africa, South America, Oregon, our frontier Indians, our slaves, and other domestic fields. It is not yet twenty-five years old, yet it now includes, and supplies with the bread of life, a noble army of nearly forty thousand communicants. Among these are more than four thousand Indians, and nearly fifteen thousand colored people. It sustains a band of missionary laborers more than three hundred strong. We assert that, all things considered, these results are not exceeded in the history of modern missions. If we exclude the thousands of white communicants in the Methodist missions in this country, (twenty thousand,) and in the Wesleyan missions in France, the British provinces, &c., *the remaining communicants of the united Methodist missions are considerably more than all the missionary converts of all the rest of Protestant Christendom put together !**

These are facts, and they speak with a voice that cannot be misunderstood. Here is a sect which, with little pretension to adventitious influence, and through much obloquy and poverty, has in about a century equaled, in England, about one-half of most the dissenting bodies combined, and in this country is nearly twice as large as any other sect of the land, though

Wesleyans have, before their recent extraordinary efforts for education, sustained in England and Wales more than two hundred and seventy day schools, including more than twenty thousand children, and three thousand six hundred sabbath schools. They teach in these schools nearly forty thousand scholars, at an annual expense of \$100,000.

* About one-third more. See the Foreign Missionary Chronicle for 1843, Methodist Missionary Report for 1843, and Sunday-School Messenger, February 16, 1843.

many had buried generations of communicants before it had *one*, and this same sect exceeds in its missionary converts those of all the rest of Protestant Christendom. To what is this extraordinary success attributable? Assuredly there is some most potent cause for it. It would be uncharitable to ascribe it to our doctrines alone, for the fundamental ones are common to all evangelical churches. Is it ascribed to our zeal? But that zeal, through the effect of the divine Spirit, is produced by means. And what are our peculiar means? What but our ministerial arrangement, our *itinerancy*, infusing missionary energy into all its auxiliary provisions? This is the mainmast of our bark—the engine of our train. Who, then, shall presume to propose innovations that may affect unfavorably this stupendous instrument? Are we not right in scrupling to touch it rudely, lest, like him who touched the ark, the symbol of Israel's strength, we fall and perish as a denomination? If there is any feature of their cause to which Methodists should adhere immovably, it is their glorious *itinerancy*. Who can recount what it has accomplished, under the blessing of God, for this land? What would Methodism be without it in ten or twenty years? It is, indeed, a system of sacrifice, but the sacrifice is mutual between the ministry and the people, and infinitely greater with the former than the latter; and all its hardships are abundantly indemnified by its singular usefulness. It has enabled us pre-eminently to preach the gospel “to the poor.” It has given us the van rank of the church in the progress of the western frontier; and, throughout the length and breadth of this land, its fruits are like the herbage of the fields. We repeat, the missionary ardor and

energy of the church, growing out of its itinerancy, have, under God, done this; and the day that this is forgotten, Methodism begins to wane.*

* Dr. Baird pays the following tribute to our church :—" Since its organization in 1784, though not without its share of difficulties, its career, upon the whole, has been remarkably prosperous, and God has enabled it to overcome every hinderance with wonderful success. We have seen the numerical amount of its members sixty years ago to be 15,000—in 1843 it was 1,068,525 communicants; and the probable proportion of the community under the influence of this church's ministry, that is, who attend its preaching, as stated by Bishop Soule before the British Conference in August, 1842, is 5,000,000. Surely we may well exclaim, "What hath God wrought!" It covers the whole land with its network system of stations and circuits, and carries the gospel into thousands of the most remote, as well as the most secluded and thinly-peopled neighborhoods. This denomination has made great exertions to increase the number of its church edifices within the last few years; but its itinerating ministers preach in thousands of places where no such buildings are yet erected, or, at least, none belonging to that denomination. In these cases they hold their meetings in school-houses, court-houses, and private houses. No American Christian, who takes a comprehensive view of the progress of religion in this country, and considers how wonderfully the means and instrumentalities employed are adapted to the extent and the wants of that country, can hesitate for a moment to bless God for having, in his mercy, provided them all. Nor will he fail to recognize in the Methodist economy, as well as in the zeal, the devoted piety, and the efficiency of its ministry, one of the most powerful elements in the religious prosperity of the United States, *as well as one of the firmest pillars of their civil and political institutions.*"

CHAPTER III.

THE APPOINTING POWER OF EPISCOPACY.

Three modes of appointment—First, by the preachers and people in common—Second, by a committee of preachers and laymen—Third, the episcopal mode.

THE *chief object* of our system being determined, the question respecting its *chief*, or *directing power*, recurs. Where shall the appointing power be vested? for it must exist, and exist vigorously, to propel such machinery.

I. It is clear, that it cannot be left to the *preachers* and *societies themselves*; because

1. Such are the tendencies of human nature that the largest societies would be disposed to choose the most popular men, and the more popular preachers would be likely to reciprocate the disposition. The wealthier would thus keep always the best preachers, and the gifts of the ministry would not be distributed. One important advantage of the itinerancy would hereby be lost.

2. The less able preachers, kept by the above course in the feeble appointments, would sooner or later be starved out, or compelled to retire to their workshops and ploughs, and a large portion of our work be abandoned. This is a result that we can hardly now avoid. The least relaxation would render it uncontrollable, and thus, as we have said, one-third of our appointments soon be destroyed; and much of our moral energy gone. We soberly believe that this result would ensue in a very few years after such an arrangement of the appointing power.

3. Many societies would be liable to choose the same man, and many men the same place; who shall then decide? And,

4. If even there could be devised a mode of determining such cases, yet if the *itinerancy* is to be maintained in *fact*, and not merely in name; if these changes are to be as frequent and as extensive as they now are, what a scene of negotiation, strife, and disappointment must be kindled every year or two in the societies? Would not these inevitable consequences more than counterbalance the advantages of such an abortive itinerancy? Would it not be better to turn Congregationalist entirely, and at once? Yet this is virtually the system of the recent seceders; for though they have a committee to adjust the appointments, yet their preachers and societies are allowed to negotiate beforehand, and the committee are to conform to these previous negotiations as far as practicable. In England, where ample funds are possessed, and no new appointment received unless it can, by the aid of these funds, maintain a preacher, this plan might operate; but here it is no better, nay, it is worse, than Congregationalism. If the committee should not deem it practicable to conform to such arrangements, what dissatisfaction and strife must follow the rupture of the previous negotiations? And if they do conform to them, a few leading men will always possess the best appointments, while the feebler societies and preachers must dwindle and fail through neglect.

II. It is evident that a *committee of preachers and laymen* could not best conduct it. ✓

1. Such a committee could not be disinterested.

The preachers on it would have an interest in the appointments, as would also the societies to which the laymen belong.

2. Such a committee would be composed of sectional men; they could not be well acquainted with all the appointments, and the qualifications and conveniences of the respective preachers. Suppose this committee, for example, composed of three preachers in the New-England Conference, one from Boston, one from Worcester, and one from Springfield, and as many laymen from the same or other places, what could they do with the appointment of a hundred or more men to all parts of the commonwealth? Of most of the places they could know nothing. They must, therefore, have written or personal communications from most of the appointments; these must be heard, read, compared, discussed, &c. Amid such confusion, harassed by conflicting claims, how and when could they come to a conclusion of the business? How much preferable is a permanent committee, (such as our bishops and presiding elders virtually are,) who, by making this their responsibility, and traversing the whole field, can become acquainted with the abilities and wants of the individual preachers and societies, and, by having no share in the appointments, can be disinterested?

3. Such a committee would require a popular election in the conference; electioneering and caucusing, with their usual evils, favoritism among the preachers, and consequent jealousies and dissensions, would follow.

4. We have said that the members of such a committee would have a personal interest in the appoint-

ments ; now if it were limited to four or five, in order to keep out, as much as possible, this selfish interference, it could not, as we have shown, represent generally the societies ; it could not know well their wants, while, as we have stated, our present plan includes usually four or five—the presiding elders and bishops—without these disadvantages. If, on the other hand, it should be numerous, including representatives from all, or most, of the societies, it would be a large popular assembly, and never able to come to a determination of so many and such various claims, and would merely give but a fuller play to the selfish interests of its members—and what must be the “confusion worse confounded” which would result where an appeal is allowed, as in the system of the late seceders, from the decisions of the committee to the whole conference, more or less of the members of which must be involved in any change ?

5. Similar modifications of the appointing power have been adopted by the Protestant Methodists, and have failed. We would not refer to these brethren, mistaken as we suppose them to be, with prejudice, but as affording evidence on what we deem an important question. It cannot be denied that their innovation has proved abortive. At their secession they carried with them a strong ministerial force, and a considerable lay membership ; but with all the advantages of later secessions from the parent church, plausible appeals to the popular feeling in favor of lay rights, the great revivals of the times, and twenty-five years of agitation, and eighteen of organized effort, they number but little more than one-third of the increase alone of the Methodist Episcopal Church in a single

year. They have not erected in New-England, the stronghold of lay rights, a dozen chapels during all these years of agitation and effort. The itinerant system moves heavily among them. In many important places it is virtually suspended, and many of their societies and preachers, tired of the irregularity and distraction of the plan, have returned to the bosom of the elder church.

III. In view of these considerations, the Methodist Episcopal Church has chosen superintendents in whom to vest this power—men who have no local or selfish interest in it, but travel over the whole land, and are counseled and aided by presiding elders, whose local inspection of the societies enables the superintendent to suit his appointments to their necessities. How could this power be better vested? Our English brethren have a committee of preachers alone, but these have a selfish interest in the appointments; while we have virtually such a committee, (the presiding elders and bishops,) but so situated as not to have any such personal interests. The occasional embarrassments which attend our method are believed to be much less serious than those which occur in the appointments of the Wesleyan committee, and the efficiency of our system, as attested by its results, is far in advance of that of the transatlantic Methodists.

CHAPTER IV.

CHECKS ON THE SYSTEM.

Checks of the ministry on the episcopacy—Checks of the people on the whole system—Restrictions of the bishops—Reflections.

HAVING thus stated the *chief object* of our system, and its appropriate *directing power*, the third question returns,—*What checks are there to this necessary appointing power?* To simply assert that the bishops have it, as our opponents do, without the above views and others that remain, is as startling as it is false. ✓ Such a power, unnecessary and unbalanced, would not be tolerated by Methodists one hour.

Here, then, for the extraordinary advantages of the *itinerancy*, are the preachers, on the one hand, giving up the choice of their appointments, and submitting to be sent, like men in battle, to all points of the field; ✓ and the people, on the other, abandoning the choice of their pastors. The sacrifice is common to both; both ought, therefore, to have a check upon the appointing power; but as it bears most onerously on the preacher, he should have the strongest control of it. What checks, then, have the *ministry* on this power?

1. They elect the officer who bears it. Methodist bishops have no vote in the appointment of their associates or successors; while in the Protestant Episcopal Church, though every member of the lower house of the General Convention should vote for a candidate, the bishops can reverse his election.

2. The bishop is responsible to them for his con-

duct, private and official; while, in the Protestant Episcopal Church, a bishop can be tried and deposed only by bishops.


3. They can modify or utterly abolish his power in the General Conference. This is certainly sufficient control. This terrible power, which is represented as tyrannizing over their destinies, is then *created, controlled, and can be annihilated* by them at their pleasure. Are they slaves, then? Or is not their example in this respect one of the noblest instances of heroic self-sacrifice on the earth? Is it not morally sublime? and should it not excite the admiration, instead of the abuse, of their fellow-Christians?

In the next place, What check have the *people* on this machinery? It is clear, that as the preachers appoint the bishops, and the bishops distribute the preachers, the people should check the whole plan by a counterbalance upon the whole ministerial body.

1. This is provided in the most decisive form that it could possibly assume, namely, the *power of pecuniary supplies*. No *stipulated contract* for support exists in the Methodist economy. The Discipline *allows* a certain support, but does not enforce it; and no Methodist preacher *can prosecute a civil suit for his salary*.* The General Conference disclaims all right to tax the property of our members. A Methodist church has no necessity, in order to control or remove the preacher, to prosecute him by a tedious and expensive process at law, but simply to signify that after a given date his supplies cease. He can-

* The word *salary* was changed in the Discipline to "*allowance*," in 1808, the year when a delegated General Conference was established.

not live on air; he must submit or depart. This would be a sufficient guaranty, certainly; and this check applies not merely to a specific prerogative of the ministry, but to the *whole* ministerial system. The lamented Dr. Emory thus states it:—"We have said that the Methodist Episcopal Church possesses effective and substantial security against any encroachments of tyranny on the part of her pastors. This security, to say nothing of higher principles, is amply provided in the fact, so obvious to common sense, that the interests of the preachers, as men, are not only coincident, but identical, with all the interests which bind them to be good pastors; and that these again are identical with the interests of the people. They cannot possibly have any earthly motive for setting themselves in opposition to the people. All human motives are on the other side. And the far greater danger is, that their sense of dependence, and the pressure or apprehension of want, may tempt them, in the general state of our poor fallen nature, to *lower* the gospel standard, and to *relax* its holy discipline, in accommodation to the common frailties of those who hold over them, and over their wives and children, and all most dear to them, the fearful power of feeding or starving them at discretion. For the sober truth is, that there is not a body of ministry in the world more perfectly dependent on those whom they serve than the Methodist *itinerant* ministry. In those churches which have a lay representation, the pastors make legal contracts with their people, and have legal remedies to enforce their fulfillment. We make no such contracts, and have no such remedies. In this, our system is more Scriptural, and renders us more



dependent. It places us, in fact, not only from year to year, or from quarter to quarter, but from week to week, within the reach of such a controlling check, on the part of the people, as is possessed, we verily believe, by no other denomination whatever; and which is considered, both by them and by us, as a relinquishment of what might be claimed, on our part, fully equivalent to the relinquishment, on their part, of a direct representation in our General Conferences."

2. Another powerful check is, that *the people themselves make all their preachers*. No man becomes a preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church unless he is first recommended by the society of which he is a member, or the leaders' meeting. With this recommendation he goes before the quarterly conference, which is composed almost entirely of laymen, and they license him. The preacher, presiding elder, or bishop himself, cannot give this license; he can only *write* it when the people thus order it. And if all the bishops and preachers in the land should wish the preacher thus licensed to become a member of the conference, or traveling connection, he cannot, without the permission of the laymen of the quarterly conference. A candidate for license must then, first, be *recommended* by a body of laymen; second, this recommendation must be *accepted* by another body of laymen; third, his license must be *annually renewed* by laymen; fourth, if he wishes *ordination*, it must be voted by laymen; fifth, if he wishes admission to the *conference*, he must be recommended by laymen.


A popular control of the ministry, equal to these two examples, we know not elsewhere in the Christian church. It might be abused to the great injury, or

even destruction, of the church; but the interests of the laity require its right use, just as the interests of the clergy require the right use of their powers; and it would be about as proper to provide laws against such abuse as it would to provide laws to keep our opponents from hanging themselves. Such powers have, indeed, been abused, and men have also hung themselves; but the constitution of the human mind is itself sufficient law against such liabilities.

In this sense it may be said that the Methodists elect their pastors. The church in any given conference is a *unit*. The societies supply the preachers for this general church, through the quarterly conference, with the understanding, that out of the body of pastors thus provided by themselves, they are to have a preacher who is to be appointed in such manner as the best interests of the whole church demand.

To these remarks it may be objected, that the preacher has the privilege of appointing some of the officers of the church, who, *ex-officio*, are members of the quarterly conference.

He nominates the stewards, but this can be no material objection; for, as the quarterly conference *elects* them, it can compel him to nominate such as are satisfactory. But the leaders he appoints; and he should do so for these good reasons: 1. *Their work is entirely his*; it is pastoral labor. The labors of long circuits would not at first allow the preacher to visit much the members of the local appointments. Leaders did, and still do, this work in another form. It is a spiritual supervision of the church, rightfully pertaining to the ministry; but in this case delegated in part to the leaders. The ministry should certainly



have the power to choose their delegates to do their own work. 2. What might be the results if the classes should choose their own leaders, as among the seceders? These classes are often composed of young converts, and include all members, however excitable or extravagant. The man who could be most extravagant would, in many cases, be preferred; not the aged and experienced, who could instruct and build them up. 3. The process of electioneering, through all the classes once a year, would produce endless distractions and feuds; and, 4. Members of classes who should vote against their leader, would ever feel uneasy under his guidance; his reproofs would be construed into party prejudice, and his admonitions be rejected. Better would it be to give up the classes, than have them thus fountains of discord. But though he appoints these officers, it is obvious that every motive is in favor of the right use of this power, and the preceding check applies here most effectually.

"These remarks [on the pecuniary check] apply not only to the mode in which the preachers are appointed—on a principle of mutual sacrifice for the general good, and one to which we believe our people peculiarly attached, in support of an itinerant system—but they apply with equal force to the whole of the official conduct of each individual pastor; and, above all, in his appointment of class leaders, of which so much has been said. That the pastor, agreeably to our Discipline, possesses the right, as a branch of his pastoral oversight, to appoint whom he thinks best qualified to aid him, as leaders, and to continue to change them, is not disputed. But it is equally certain, on the other hand, that the means of his support

are in the hands of the classes; and that the supplying or withholding it, as *they* judge proper, is as indisputably *their* right. Were a preacher, therefore, governed by no better principle than his own interest, he could not successfully resist the just wishes of the classes by arbitrarily obtruding on them obnoxious leaders. Suppose a preacher should even be so stupid, or so wicked, as to attempt a course of tyrannical appointments. In the first place, he may be arrested at any period of the year, on application to a bishop or presiding elder, and, if convicted, may be removed, and degraded from the pastoral charge; or, secondly, supposing it even possible that redress from these sources should be delayed or denied, is it not plain that the classes have the means of redress in their own hands? Suppose they should say to the pastor—and in circumstances of such extremity they would be justified in saying it—If you obstinately persist in the vexatious exercise of an extreme power to force on us obnoxious leaders, we will also exercise our extreme power to withhold our contributions. Where would be his empty boast? Would he not be paralyzed at once? Who does not see, then, that on our system, the true effective power is, in reality, in the hands of the people; and more perfectly so, in fact, than in almost any other denomination? It is such a power that the preachers must be mad to provoke its array against them, and more than men to be able to resist it.”—*Dr. Emory.*

These are some of the respective checks of preachers and people on the necessary power which moves the itinerancy, and of the latter, on the whole ministerial system. What sober man will say, in view of

them, that any revolutionary outcry against the probable abuse of such a system, is not preposterous? But there are others equally remarkable, and as they are habitual, they may be considered common to both.

1. The bishops who have this power itinerate throughout the land, and are therefore cut off from local or selfish partialities in making the appointments. They may be now in Illinois, and next season in Maine, and are more than any other men "in labors abundant."

2. They have no superior salaries above their brethren of the ministry, and are considered to be of the same ministerial order, having only a distinct office, which itself is based on expediency, not on an alledged apostolic succession.

3. They have no vote in any question to be decided in General or Annual Conferences, *not even in making rules by which they themselves are to be governed.*

4. Their conduct, both private and official, is examined at every General Conference by a committee of one from each annual conference. They are thus virtually arraigned and examined every four years, however pure their reputation.

5. Any person, lay or clerical, can appear before this committee and accuse the bishop, and that, too, in his absence, *and without giving him any previous notice.*

6. A bishop may be *arrested and expelled* not only for *immoral*, but for *improper*, conduct—a severity used toward no other member of the church; for "no one but a bishop, not even a child or a slave, can be expelled for the first improper act of that character."

And an improper use of his powers comes under this head.

7. If a bishop be expelled he has no appeal: a privilege enjoyed in any other department of the church.*

If there is any oppression in the Methodist Episcopal Church it is on the bishops. No officer of any other enlightened body on earth, civil or religious, is so severely restrained; and it is indeed questionable whether any man should expose himself to the liabilities which may result from such peculiar restrictions.

It is obvious, from the foregoing pages, that the change proposed by seceders in our economy is scarcely more than a *matter of form*, so far as a lay control of the church is concerned, while its difficulties and results would be matters of serious reality.

We have been compelled, in these brief limits, to present merely the skeleton of our arguments, but they afford a comprehensive view of the system of Methodism; and, now, how does it appear thus viewed? and how appear by the side of it those partial statements of our opponents, which, in describing its ministerial functions, so cautiously omit its powerful checks and balances? What becomes of the slavery of the preachers and people? Instead of servility, they are presenting an instance of disinterested sacrifice and labor which allies them to the Christians of the first ages, and the results of which, on both sides of the Atlantic, are exciting the interest of Christendom.

The complex, and yet harmonious, constitution of

* See Hedding on the Discipline for these and further particulars.

the Methodist Church in the United States, would be an interesting subject of further discussion had we space. It is a powerful system of wheels within wheels, but all revolving with the facility of a well-made machine; the power which propels it at one extremity being balanced by appropriate checks at the other. Our general conferences occurring once in four years, the annual conferences once a year, the quarterly conferences once in three months, the leaders' meetings once a month, the classes once a week, form an admirable series of gradations, extending from one week to four years, and covering all the successive intervals. To these correspond, also, our gradations of labor—bishops traversing the continent, presiding elders traveling over extended districts, circuit preachers occupying less extensive fields, assisted by local preachers and exhorters; and, finally, leaders inspecting, weekly, divisions of the local societies.

This system has worked well, the surest proof to sensible men of its excellence. The objections to it refer to hypothetical consequences. Its history records no serious abuse, no more serious defects than such individual acts of administration as result from the common imperfections of our nature, and are liable to occur in the best legislatures and the purest courts of justice.

And now, if from the difference in their origin, nature, and design, it is not necessary that religious polities should be modeled on civil ones—if most secular voluntary combinations are not so constructed—if no leading denomination in the land has so modeled its system—if there is no liability in ours calling for such a change—if such a change is perilous—if it is im-

practicable—if the only object in ecclesiastical organizations should be practical utility, guarded against oppressive tendencies—and if this system has excelled all others in utility, and is thoroughly guarded against such tendencies, and has never seriously developed such tendencies, shall we not hesitate, nay, shall we not shrink with most serious scrupulosity from any innovation which, by changing its essential features, may enervate its action and frustrate its providential mission? It is now under as salutary a popular control as any representative arrangement could be; why, then, sacrifice or risk its efficiency; why throw into rancorous tumult its community, as has repeatedly been attempted, merely to put this sufficient control in another form, having no other advantage than a vaunted resemblance to a system which has an entirely different nature and purpose? And do not those, who, by outcries of tyranny, and clamorous and unfounded appeals to political sentiments, attempt to destroy this system, and break up the churches which its friends, through years of labor and toil, have founded, undertake a work which good men should tremble to assume?

It is this system of *voluntary* self-sacrifice and labor that is denounced by our antagonists as “oppression and vassalage.” It needs only to be examined to be approved. By it, the gospel has kept pace with our frontier settlements; by it, we have conveyed the word of God into almost every nook and corner of the land; by it, we have gathered nearly one hundred thousand African slaves into the church, and more of the savages of the wilderness than all other Christian denominations put together; by it, we have spread a

moral leaven throughout the whole practical class of our population, and into some of the higher spheres of society; and in its communion are now imbodied a million of our fellow-citizens, besides several millions who attend its worship. Under the blessing of our Lord, we have thus succeeded by our peculiar system; and while he thus approves it, we may safely abide under it, and commit to it our children.

CHAPTER V.

OBJECTIONS TO, AND DANGERS OF, THE ITINERANCY.

Unsuitable appointments—Less dangerous than with Congregationalism—Dissatisfaction at the removal of successful pastors—Itinerancy applicable to cities—Negotiations between preachers and churches—Multiplication of small stations.

WE have presented in the preceding pages a defensive view of the *general principles* of our church government. Of the constituent departments of the system, and the functions which pertain to them, no more has been said than is deemed essential for the vindication of these general or fundamental principles. Any further detail is rendered unnecessary, as the book of Discipline is everywhere accessible, and a minute description of the several functions of the system must needs be but a copy of that volume.

There are, however, two very important features of our economy which are liable to be impaired if not more seriously affected by somewhat prevalent opinions, and to which we would, therefore, direct special attention.

It is obvious from the preceding discussion that the

grand peculiarity of the Methodist *ecclesiastical system* is the *itinerancy of its ministry*. This is the cornerstone of the whole structure. How carefully, then, should it be guarded against deterioration! Bishops Asbury and Coke, in their explanatory "Notes on Discipline," (*Discipline*, 1798, pp. 40-44,) say: "*Our grand-plan*, in all its parts, leads to an *itinerant ministry*. Our bishops are *traveling bishops*. All the different orders which compose our conferences are employed in the *traveling line*; and our local preachers are, *in some degree*, traveling preachers. Everything is kept moving as far as possible; and we will be bold to say, that, next to the grace of God, there is nothing *like this* for keeping the whole body alive, from the centre to the circumference, and for the continual extension of that circumference on every hand." We need constantly to be reminded of its signal advantages, and the comparative insignificance of its inconveniences, if we would keep ourselves from becoming infected with the Congregational and more popular views of other sects.

1. One of its alledged inconveniences is, the *liability of disappointment among the people*, in respect to a pastor, who, in most cases, has been little, or not at all, known to them, and in whose appointment they have had little or no direct agency. It is not denied that such disappointments do occur, and they probably produce more prejudice than any other cause against the itinerant system, and occasion the most perplexing trials of the episcopacy. Yet, if there were no other relieving fact, would not the extraordinary utility of the system be a sufficient counterbalance to this incidental evil? Review the proofs of its utility given in

the preceding pages, and answer. Though, therefore, the evil is admitted, it is not admitted to be sufficiently serious to be contrasted for a moment with the undeniable excellences of the plan. It occurs but occasionally. In most instances it is but partial, affecting a small minority. In many instances it is soon dissipated by a better acquaintance with the new pastor, and, in not a few, it is converted into the warmest interest for him, by unexpected results from his ministry, especially where he is an humble and devoted laborer, and meekly bears the severe trial of his faith, to which such disaffection subjects him. Our history is full of illustrative facts, so much so, that they have come to be looked upon as providential confirmations of the system.

But, again: we contend that such disappointments are not peculiar to an itinerant ministry. They are quite as common among Congregationalists. Their frequency in the latter case is notorious. We have said, that in our own church they are limited generally to a small minority; and it may be affirmed that this minority is usually no larger than can be found equally dissatisfied in almost every Congregational Church at the settlement of a new pastor. Let it not be said, that the discontent cannot, in the latter case, be so deep and dangerous as in the former, from the fact, that the appointment is matter of popular choice, though subjected to the control of the majority; for we reply, that the economy of our own church is a matter of popular choice, though the ministerial appointments, for the sake of the itinerancy, are subjected to the control of the episcopacy. The people enter into this arrangement voluntarily; and they

prize the itinerancy so highly, that all the secessions from the main bodies of the church, in both England and America, have retained it tenaciously. If, therefore, the voluntary agreement, that the majority shall rule, should pacify the discontent of the minority, it should be equally quieted by the consideration that the itinerant system, in our own church, has been voluntarily adopted by all who enter our communion.

We go further, and assert that such dissatisfactions are more liable to be violent and pernicious under Congregationalism than under our itinerant regime, for two reasons,—

First. The appointment in the former case being subject immediately to the popular voice, is usually the occasion of much previous discussion. Opinions are compared and opposed; as a consequence, passions are often excited, parties formed, and, not unfrequently, churches rent. If, at last, the minority submits, the ministrations of the opposed pastor can scarcely be supposed to obtain from them a fair appreciation; his reproofs will hardly be received aright; his defects will be liable to uncharitable judgment; and his measures to vexatious quibblings. The itinerant may, indeed, have some of these trials, but not exasperated by previous and partisan excitements.

Secondly. In the case of the latter, it is always known that a change can be effected in the course of a year, and doubtless much discontent is allayed by this fact, whereas among our Congregational brethren no such regular and peaceful mode of remedying the evil exists; but the dissatisfied party have a strong inducement to continued and energetic opposition in

the consideration that if they succumb, they either must desert the church, or be indefinitely under a ministry, which is not agreeable to their judgments or inclinations, and that a change is only to be secured by such agitations as may procure them a majority of votes.

It is believed, therefore, that our system is not more, if it is not less, embarrassed by the alledged evil than Congregationalism itself.

2. A more prevalent complaint against the itinerancy is the contrary and popular objection that *it removes favorite as well as unpopular pastors*. The objection arises from a generous, but fallacious feeling; one which, however, has wrung many hearts with grief. It is quite natural that a devoted people should become attached to a faithful pastor; and such a pastor will generally have to sunder, at his departure, the most precious ties—those which attach to him his own spiritual children—the lambs whom he himself has gathered into the fold. Difficult indeed must be such a separation, and it is not surprising that the popular feeling occasionally revolts at it. Let us, however, bear in mind, that the very ground of the attachment is the reason of the change. If the faithful laborer has been successful in his charge, surely every sentiment of Christian benevolence would dictate, that, after having expended his efforts for two years on one field, and made it blossom as the rose, his useful labors should be transferred to a less-favored sphere. The sacrifice then, however painful, is characterized by the noblest generosity and disinterestedness. Let us ever thus consider it, and its grief even will become precious and salutary.

Better is it by far, both for preacher and people, that their relation should be changed early enough to anticipate that declension of interest which, in a large majority of cases, must occur after the freshness and novelty of the first two years of pastoral intercourse. Mr. Wesley considered that two years were enough to exhaust both his resources and his people's interest. If our system, then, is a grievance to the affections of the people in some instances, it is, for the same reason, the less liable to grieve their forbearance in others.

3. We have need, thirdly, to guard against a disposition, occasionally shown in our denser communities, to consider *the itinerancy inapplicable to large cities*. Its necessity may not appear so urgent in them as in sparser communities, yet it is unquestionably highly advantageous. Its moral benefits, enumerated in a former part of this work, are as great in the city as in the country, and perhaps much more needed. Its influence on the spirit of the preacher; its distribution of the variety of talents; its tendency to keep alive the sentiment of unity and co-operation among us; in fine, the whole moral energy of the system may find full play in the range of the large city. Sad for our cause is it that we have begun to think otherwise. Experiment is the test of truth, and experiment has proved the practicability and usefulness of an itinerant ministry in cities. Until this day, our Wesleyan brethren maintain it steadfastly in all their city charges, as well as their rural districts; and we have successfully maintained it, so far as respects its annual or biennial changes.

4. A fourth danger, against which we should be admonished, the more emphatically because it is a grow-

ing one, is the not uncommon *habit of negotiating appointments between preachers and people*. Bishop Asbury, who so rigorously maintained the integrity of our economy, always contended for the right of the people to represent to the appointing power their pastoral wants. It is equally just also that the preachers should have a fair representation of their necessities, so far as these can affect their appointments; but the church has provided, in the office of the presiding elder, an adequate means of such representation. It is his duty to survey the whole field of his district quarterly, ascertaining the condition of its churches, the character and qualifications of its laborers, and preparing himself to represent them fully at the annual conference. This practice of previous negotiation we have no hesitancy in pronouncing an utter infraction of our economy; such a one as must prove ruinous to it if generally adopted; and such as no high-minded Methodist preacher, who has respect for his brethren or himself, ought to admit.

It is unjust and embarrassing to the appointing powers. They are bound to make such a distribution of the ministry as the interests of the *whole* church, within the limits of the conference, require; but these negotiations between individual churches and preachers cannot possibly be founded on any such comprehensive view of the common good. If the appointing powers regard them, they must, in most instances, deviate from the only correct principle of making the appointments, and act contrary to their own convictions of what is just. If they disregard them, they expose themselves to the resentment of both the disappointed preacher and charge, impose the severest trials on the pastor

who may be sent to the latter, and risk, perhaps, its quiet and prosperity. What man, understanding the peculiarity of our economy, and regarding the vows of his ordination, can guiltlessly promote such confusion?

It is unjust to all the other churches of the conference. They all have an equal claim on the fair distribution of the abilities of the conference. If, however, any previous local arrangements should put beyond their constitutional command any portion of those abilities, they are thus far wronged; and it is obvious that, if such pernicious deviations from the legal course are persisted in, there is no protection for the injured churches other than the adoption of the same course. And who does not perceive, at a glance, that the result must be an entire overthrow of the itinerant arrangement?

Let us abandon, then, and frown down this unwarrantable conduct. Doubtless it may be natural enough, and not particularly dangerous, for preachers and the officers of churches to indulge in casual expressions of their mutual predilections, or even to have more serious consultations about their future pastoral arrangements; but never should these measures partake of the character of a negotiation, or extend any further than a conditional agreement, left entirely to be determined by the wants of the *whole church*, as represented to the appointing powers. And no genuine Methodist preacher or layman, who has mind and heart enough to appreciate the transcendent economy of his church, will perceive in this requirement anything else than a noble disinterestedness, worthy of good men and a good cause.


5. Fifthly, let us resist the tendency, lately so com-

mon, to divide circuit appointments into small stations. Most perplexing evils are already arising from this policy. They are particularly felt by the episcopacy in the arrangement of the annual appointments.

Many of these petty stations, especially in the eastern sections of our work, are too small to afford a comfortable subsistence to the preacher. Some of our conferences are groaning under the intolerable consequences, and yet proceed on inexorably in the very policy which has brought this calamitous state of things upon us—a policy which perplexes our annual appointments; absorbs, by a large per cent., an undue number of ministerial laborers; keeps these laborers on a stinted support, under which many of them are annually sinking with discouragement; supersedes, and has indeed nearly annihilated, in some places, the local ministry; is crippling many of our societies by prematurely insulating them, and thus burdening them with the expense of independent support when they are capable only of a combined one;—a policy which, in fine, is adapted only to extinguish from our operations the great moral energies of the itinerancy, and spread through our work a sense of enfeeblement and discouragement.

We hesitate not to express here to the church our strong conviction, that its course, in this respect, is one of the most ominous circumstances in its present history; and that its future integrity and hope, as a peculiar system of Christian labors, depend on an early and determined resistance to the downward tendency.

Let us not be misunderstood. We do not insist that the sections of our work thus afflicted should return to the old system of long circuits, requiring four, six, or



eight weeks to compass them, nor to even such, however much smaller, as must require the use of horses; but we do say that there is no other alternative than that many of our societies must sink, or, by a limited circuit system, combine for mutual support. This combination might be limited, in each instance, to but four or five appointments. They may be all within a circle of some five or ten miles radius, and thus have little or no necessity for horses, but give healthful walks, and a much more comfortable support to the preachers, and relief from insupportable pressure to the feeble appointments.

Our Wesleyan brethren in England present us with the model. Such is the English estimation of the *moral* advantages alone of the itinerancy, that though, in their maturer field, the pecuniary expediency of it scarcely exists, yet they retain the plan, as we have said, in its full vigor. Even the rich and crowded societies of Liverpool, London, Manchester, Birmingham, &c., are included in circuits, and the preachers pass from one to the other by incessant changes. A proposition to do away this arrangement would be considered a blow aimed at the foundation of the economy of Wesleyan Methodism. Yet most of their circuits do not require horses, or long absence of the preacher from his local residence. The *esprit du corps* of the ministry and people is kept alive by this course; the local ministry is called into co-operation with the itinerant, and a motive is thus given them to study and improve; new or feeble societies are easily supported, by being attached to efficient circuits; the preachers, *without exception*, get a good support, and a consciousness of competency is diffused through the whole body.

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This is what we want. For example, it is often the case that we have some four or more small appointments within a few miles of each other, each having its own preacher, but all so feeble that no one of their pastors gets a competent support, and no one of the appointments rises above pecuniary embarrassments. Now, if these four societies were combined into a circuit, having three preachers instead of four, the three preachers could (by the aid of a local preacher, who would visit each appointment but once a month, or even without such aid) supply each with about its present amount of preaching, and thus save the present expense of the fourth preacher, to be distributed among the three. We give this as a very moderate example. In much of our territory the arrangement could be more extensively applied.

Look, for a moment, at what would be some of its advantages in the section of the country where it is most needed. From the latest statistics we estimate that there are at least five hundred and fifty societies in the New-England conferences; for safety, say five hundred. Suppose, now, that the expense of one in three of these societies could be saved as above, it would give us the present expenditure of more than one hundred and sixty-six societies thus redeemed. If we take this expenditure at the small amount of one hundred and fifty dollars per annum for each, it will give us twenty-four thousand nine hundred dollars! Nearly *twenty-five thousand dollars* now uselessly, nay, we will venture to say, *worse* than uselessly expended, would be saved, to be added to the support of our now suffering ministry. We say this amount is now worse than uselessly expended, for we verily believe that the

success of our preachers on this itinerant arrangement, and with the comfort of this better support, would be greater than it is on the plan which now involves the twenty-five thousand dollars of additional expenditure.

But this is not all. One quarterly conference would suffice for each of these small circuits. The districts could be vastly extended, and the burden of the presiding elder's support be much relieved in each society. Besides these pecuniary advantages, the consciousness of inefficiency which results from our pecuniary embarrassments would pass away or be materially relieved, the families of the preachers would be rendered comfortable, and the preachers themselves be saved from many anxieties and cares which now interfere with their usefulness.

It is an important question, How can such a reform be effected? It may be impracticable in respect to old appointments, but a most effectual measure would be for each conference to resolve *to receive no new appointment* but in connection with one or more old ones, in the form of a circuit, unless it can guaranty an *ample* support to the preacher. It is difficult, indeed, to reclaim our old societies from their false position, but the measure now recommended *can be done*. Let the conferences firmly resolve it, as the only remedy of the insupportable evils which are depressing portions of our work, and instruct the presiding elders to regard it as unchangeable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. We may gain fewer new societies than we now do, but we will gain better ones; and sooner or later work ourselves, in part at least, out of the quagmire of difficulties, "the slough of despond," into which the wretched policy of multiplying petty, self-starving sta-

tions has led us. We soberly believe that we should be much "better off," and do more real good, with but three-fourths our present number of stations, vigorously sustained, than we now can with the additional one-fourth hanging as dead weights on our machinery, and abstracting away the energies of the others.

If this suggestion were alone adopted, *it would put a stop at once to the growth of the evil.* Our present feeble societies, or many of them, if not all, could, in the course of years, work their way up to a position of competency; and if no more incompetent ones are added, we may some time or other, however distant, rise above our present embarrassments. Our Wesleyan brethren adopted, long ago, this policy, and they owe to it much of their present efficiency.

What is our present course? It is about this. A preacher occasionally visits a neighboring village, and is instrumental in the conversion of a few individuals, or the outer scintillations of a revival reach the place, or perhaps a few members remove to it. A class is formed. The pastor supplies them occasionally with preaching. A few of their neighbors unite with them, and a hall or school-house is procured, at an annual expense, for meetings. The neighboring stationed preachers and local preachers are called upon to supply them till conference. As the conference approaches they grow sanguine. They count their friends in the little community, project a chapel to be built in the course of a year or so, and straightway ask the presiding elder for a preacher from the next conference! The elder, backed by no such rule of conference as we have recommended, must either concur, or forfeit their favor. The preacher arrives. He finds

By assembling together, and doing their respective business as a common responsibility, their several interests as societies become identified, in their sympathies, at least; and that pure old homebred feeling which once made Methodists regard all their churches as but one family is brought again into play. This common sympathy is worth much. It is a most precious element in the public sentiment of any organization, and it is not without its practical advantages in the mutual encouragement and mutual aid which it often prompts.

This combination of appointments brings together a greater amount of experience and wisdom than can be usually assembled in the quarterly conference of a single appointment. Two good old maxims say, that in "union there is strength," and "in the multitude of counselors there is wisdom." Often the local affairs of a society become perplexed by misunderstandings and parties among its members. These influences go into the quarterly conferences, and may defy all sober or impartial proceedings. How much safer would it be, in such instances, to combine with neighboring and disinterested charges, the cooler and unbiased judgment of which might control such party aberration!

This advantage would especially be found in cases of trial. It sometimes happens that local excitement against a defendant renders an impartial trial almost impracticable, even when appealed to the quarterly conference; and doubtless many a good man has gone to his grave, feeling, through his whole life, the cruel injustice of such partial proceedings. On the present plan such cases are, to a considerable extent, put beyond local prejudices, by being subject to the examin-

CHAPTER VI.

IMPORTANCE OF THE PRESIDING ELDERSHIP.

It represents the unity of our societies—Combines many effective means of usefulness—Necessary to the annual arrangement of the appointments—Cannot be superseded by bishops or district chairman.

ONE of the most important offices of our economy is that of the presiding elder. We have no hesitancy in saying that *no other function of the system—not excepting the episcopacy itself—is capable of greater usefulness, or could not be sacrificed with less peril.* The episcopacy could not possibly proceed without it; but the presiding eldership might possibly operate the system without the episcopacy, though with clumsy inefficiency—the episcopacy exerts great and salutary influence through the church by its itinerant preaching and counsels; but the influence of the presiding eldership is on a scale more effective, because more systematic. Yet is there a disposition often shown to question its utility. Such misgivings must be confined, however, to those who have not examined its important relations to the whole economy of the church.

Let us notice some of them.

1. It is important as a *representative of the unity of our work*—no unimportant advantage in these days, when our appointments are becoming so much insulated from each other, and individualized in their spirit. The presiding elder is still a link of relationship between them. He belongs to them all through-

out his district: and his incessant journeys from one to another keeps alive the sense of a common interest and a common sympathy. We have repeatedly referred to the value of this sentiment: should it ever be extinguished, we shall learn its importance.

2. The presiding eldership is a *combination of the most effective official functions*. Its incumbent is a traveling evangelist, and travels on the largest definite scale. His preaching among the churches of his district is not casual, or by sufferance, but regular and authoritative, an official duty. What, now, we ask, might not be the achievements of a mighty man of God in such a sphere? How might he go from church to church sounding the evangelic trumpet, advocating the great interests of the age, and leading on the subordinate ministry from victory to victory! Assuredly, if such a function is not useful, the fault must be more in the officer than in the office.

Further: he has official oversight "of all the elders and deacons, traveling and local preachers, and exhorters" on his district, to give them counsel respecting their ministerial conduct, direct their studies and labors, reprove their faults, and adjust their differences. Assuredly, a man of capacity and energy may find here an enviable field of usefulness; his district may be a line of battle, whose whole movement is at his command. How many recruits may he rally into the ministerial corps! how may he impress the apostolic character on the youthful evangelists under his guidance! how cheer them in the hour of despondence, inspirit them in the day of declension or indolence, and guard them in the time of excitement and

revival! Such an office might certainly befit an apostle.

Again: he has charge of the administration of discipline throughout his district. He is "to take care that every part of our discipline be enforced." He is to preside at the trials of local preachers, and in the court of appeals. His office supposes him thoroughly acquainted with the discipline of the church; many of the preachers on stations and circuits may, from their youth or habits, be deficient in this important knowledge. A defect in the administration of discipline, especially in cases of trial or dispute among brethren, may devastate a whole church. How important, then, is that office which extends its supervision over all such cases, which presents at the altar of every church, in cases of exigency, the mature experience and skill of sanctified age, to advise and moderate parties, or, if need be, adjudicate their appeals! How much discord and ruin may it not prevent!

"By keeping," says a venerable authority, "a watchful eye over all the traveling and local preachers in the district, administering advice and admonition as occasion may require, a presiding elder may restrain irregularities in their early stages; correct small offenses before they ripen into evils which would disgrace the church, and injure the cause; and thereby prevent many of the charges and trials which otherwise would fall upon individuals to their injury, if not their ultimate ruin."—*Hedding on Discipline*, pp. 30, 31.

But still further: he presides in the quarterly conferences, and thus has a periodical examination of all the financial and other interests of the charge. Its official management, its fiscal difficulties, its pastor,

local preachers, ministers, and leaders are connected in past services and in meetings for the future at some point under the stress and influence of their common life. Not only at these regular periods but at all times and places in the district can he effectively interpret the welfare of the church. Does a difficulty arise between the preacher and people? The presiding elder steps in to remove it. Does a serious crisis threatening the quiet or the existence of the church? He is the official mediator between the parties. Does the pastor fail in health or aptitude? He provides a substitute. Does a difficult case of discipline occur? He comes as adviser or judge of appeals. Is a new church projected? He counsels in regard to its execution, its deed, and its means. Do young men of talent appear to be called to the ministry of the word? He examines them, directs their preparation, and assigns them fields. Is not this a sphere for the largest ability and usefulness? And when it is considered that a great proportion of our ministry is composed of young men, and that it receives little, if any, training before the period of actual service, such an official oversight becomes doubly important.

3. The presiding eldership is a necessary auxiliary to the episcopacy in making the annual appointments. This is its highest necessity. We have shown the impossibility of a successful itinerancy based on annual negotiations between preachers and people, and its equal impossibility in the hands of a committee of both. A committee specially devoted to the inspection of the ministry and the churches, travelling among them to ascertain their capabilities and necessities, is the only secure mode of managing this critical nu-

chinery. Such a committee are our bishops and presiding elders. The people, especially, should uphold the office as essential to their interests in the arrangement of the appointments. How could the bishops possibly make these appointments with proper discrimination, unaided by such helps? The former are few in number, and travel through the whole nation; how can they know the qualifications of all the preachers, the circumstances of their families, and the wants of all the churches?

Would you supersede the presiding elder by multiplying the bishops? In order to do it adequately, you must have about as many of the latter as of the former; and, therefore, as much, if not more, expense than you now have. What advantage, then, could there be in the change? It would be about as well to change merely the name of the presiding elders, and call them bishops.

It has been suggested that this office might be superseded by that of "district chairman." We need only give, in reply, the opinion of a good judge. Bishop Hedding remarks: "An opinion has been frequently offered, of late, that the office of presiding elder might be dispensed with; or that we might profitably substitute for it that of 'chairman of the district,' who should also be preacher in charge in a circuit or station. But this change would be liable to many objections and difficulties. In most parts of the work, the whole time of the presiding elder is needed to perform the duties required of him. And where a district consists mostly of stations, there is need of a presiding elder being present with the preachers and people more of the time than a stationed

preacher possibly could be, to enable him 'to set in order the things that are wanting,' and to prepare him to give such representations of the wants of the people, and of the gifts and qualifications of the preachers, as are absolutely necessary at the conference to enable those who fix the appointments of the preachers to perform that difficult part of our work as it should be done. But one says, 'Make the districts smaller.' Then more 'chairmen' would be necessary; and, upon the whole, as much time, traveling, and expense required as are necessary under the present system; for the district would have to pay the 'chairman' proportionally for the time he employs in the district, as well as for his traveling expenses. Besides, such a station as would be suitable for a 'chairman,' would require all his time and labor, and, between the two charges, he would be liable, in part at least, to neglect both. Finally, I have seen that mode tried in several instances, and I never knew it work well. The people in the station would say, 'Half the service of a preacher is not sufficient for us;' and the district would reply, 'Half the service of a presiding elder is not sufficient for us.'—*Hedding on Discipline*, p. 37.

Let us guard, then, against innovation in so important a part of our machinery. If the time may come when circumstances will admit its modification, most clearly that time has not yet arrived.

CHAPTER VII.

METHODISM A SPECIAL SYSTEM.

Special in its origin—In its agents—In its measures—In its spirit—Practical importance of this view of it.

It is important to our continued prosperity that we bear in mind *the special character of our mission* as a Christian sect. Our system is an onerous one, and can be borne only from this conviction.

Methodism is a special system, and every Methodist ought to be a special Christian. Its whole history and character are impressed with the marks of a special design. It originated at a special time, a period in which Dr. Watts declared that "religion was dying in the world;" and when Butler assures us that Christianity was "treated as if it had at length been discovered to be fictitious." "Just at the time," says Wesley, "when we wanted little of filling up the measure of our iniquities, did two or three clergymen of the Church of England begin vehemently to call sinners to repentance." Few periods in the history of the English Church were darker. Natural religion had become the substance of preaching; Arianism and Socinianism, under the influence of such men as Priestley, Whiston, and Dr. S. Clark, were current among the learned; the most giant advocates of skepticism England has produced—Hobbes, Bolingbroke, Hume, and Gibbon—were appearing, or had just appeared, in the conflict with Christianity; while, across the channel, the strongholds of the Reformation were yielding to a Deistical theology; and the

French philosophers were spreading moral contagion through Europe. At this dark period did God raise up Wesley, Whitefield, and their co-laborers, and thrust them out, to revive the elementary doctrines of Christianity, and exemplify again the apostolic spirit and labors.

Not only did it arise at a *special time*, but the *men who introduced it were special men*. We feel that we do not hazard much when we say that, in the group of its earliest characters, we meet with some who were the most remarkable in their respective spheres that have appeared since the foundation of Christianity—Wesley, one of the greatest of ecclesiastical legislators; Whitefield, the most extraordinary pulpit orator; Charles Wesley, the best of sacred poets; Fletcher, one of the most profound polemics; Coke, the greatest leader of modern missions; Asbury, the most laborious of bishops; and two commentators, Clarke and Benson, one among the most learned, and the other among the best of practical expositors. Who can doubt the evidence of divine Providence displayed in the co-existence and co-operation of these remarkable men? While Wesley was employing his wonderful powers in constructing and establishing the economy of Methodism, Whitefield was rousing for it the popular sympathies by his eloquence, and preparing especially other sects for the influence which time has shown it was destined to exert upon them; Charles Wesley was embodying its tenets and spirit in verse, and preparing for its future hundreds of thousands an unrivaled psalmody; Fletcher was defending, with a battle-ax, which nothing could withstand, its theology, and vindicating it as much by his

spirit as his logic; Coke was developing its plans of foreign conquest; Asbury, the great pioneer of American revivals, was applying its energies to the new circumstances of this hemisphere; and Benson and Clarke followed, fortifying it firmly on the foundation of the Scriptures. These were the leaders; but the subordinate instruments were likewise marked by strong characteristics, distinguishing them as the men raised up by God for an extraordinary purpose.

The *measures* of Methodism bear the same special character. Dr. Chalmers has characterized it as "Christianity in earnest." Effect, and *immediate* effect, is its uniform intent. Wesley and his coadjutors preached the common doctrines of the gospel, but distinguished them more clearly, and emphasized them more strongly, than others; insomuch that they struck the public attention as new truths. They were not content with the limits of church edifices, but betook themselves to the open air. Stationary labors would not satisfy their zeal; but they went up and down the land preaching by night and by day; they "ran to and fro, and knowledge increased." Methodism could not delay its great designs by waiting for a ministry qualified by the old course of preparatory education, but revived the apostolic example of a *lay ministry*. It could not allow these the limited labors of a single charge; but, hastening them from place to place, it revived the means by which the apostolic ministry conquered the world—an *itinerant ministry*. Not content with its itinerant laborers, it called into use its less available energies, by establishing the new departments of *local preachers, exhorters, and leaders*. While it retained the more formal means of grace, it

either introduced or adopted the *class-meeting*, the *band-meeting*, the *prayer-meeting*, the *camp-meeting*, the *love-feast*, and the *watch-night*. Thus it studied to apply every energy, and to apply it in the most productive manner. The effective system of American Methodism exemplifies well this, its practical energy. It is a vast and powerful machinery. Our general conferences, annual conferences, quarterly conferences, leaders'-meetings, and class-meetings; our gradations of labor—bishops, presiding elders, circuit preachers, exhorters, and leaders—form a series of instrumentalities unequalled in the economy of any other Protestant denomination.

Not only has it been thus special in the circumstances of its origin, in its characters and measures, but also in its *spirit*. What candid observer, however he may question some of its peculiarities, will deny that a more than common share of the divine influence has been vouchsafed to it, and that its system has been extraordinarily productive? We assert it, not boastfully, though gratefully; and, as an *unquestionable fact of its history*—a fact which ought to be particularly regarded, if we would appreciate the system and mission which God has appointed us. How is it otherwise that such general and constant revivals have prevailed under it; that so many thousands have been rescued by it from the lowest conditions of vice; that such multitudes have passed from within its pale joyfully to the church triumphant; and that a number, exceeding by one-third the next largest sect in the land, are still marching under its banners to the same heavenly Jerusalem?—This special success is the result of a special

energy; and all men, whose eyes are open, behold it.

Methodism is essentially vital and operative: it must ever be so: *it is an absolute necessity of its system.* And herein we observe a peculiarity which ought to strike most impressively its friends, as guarantying, with the divine blessing, its perpetual integrity and prevalence. All other sectarian forms of Christianity have declined. Congregationalism, with its simple rites, became a lifeless system of religious common-places. Protestant Episcopalianism degenerated into a spiritless ritual. All the distinctive and essential traits of each have co-existed with a general absence of vital religion. The state of the English Church when Methodism began was an example of the latter; the state of the New-England church before Edwards, of the former. But we can hardly conceive of Methodism in such a state. While these sects have lost their vitality, without losing any of their distinctive traits, *Methodism absolutely cannot thus decline without the extinction of all that is distinctively Methodistic in its system.* It seems in this view a final form of Christianity—a millennial system. How can we conceive of a lifeless laity embodied in classes, and meeting weekly to converse of Christian experience? Or of a dead ministry leading the pilgrim life of itinerants? Or of such a laity hearing, and such a ministry preaching, the distinctive doctrines of Methodism—*distinguishable conversion, the witness of the Spirit, and Christian perfection?* Herein, then, is Methodism unique: it cannot, like other sects, decline seriously, and retain its distinctive character: it can only fall by a *revolution* of its whole

practical system: it must lose its identity, and be no longer Methodism. We do not assert its infallibility, but its singular security. It may experience such a revolution; but the impediments and the improbabilities are extraordinary.

In all these respects Methodism is marked with a special character and a special purpose. Wesley said that its purpose was to "spread holiness over the land;" but it is greater; it is to "spread holiness over the world." It was raised up not merely to resuscitate the English Church, but to affect all Protestant Christendom, either by its direct influence or by its example. *It is a missionary church in its plans, a revival church in its spirit*; and such it promises to be until the world is redeemed, if we but preserve its peculiarities.

We repeat, it is important that we bear in mind this special character of our cause.

First, the idea of our special character will lead us to *bear patiently the special inconveniences of our system*. The greatest of these, to both people and preachers, arise from our *itinerancy*; and one of the most serious objections under which our polity suffers is brought against the *appointing power*, upon which the itinerancy is based; yet this itinerancy, with its episcopal basis, is the most indispensable feature of our economy. Abolish it, and you cut the locks from your young giant. Besides its moral effect upon the ministry, by reminding them that here they have no abiding city; and upon the people, by the constant distribution of our various talents; it is necessary to the support of a large portion of our appointments. Many of these do not afford a full support to the preacher, and thus it must be while there is a frontier to our work; and

such a frontier there must be till the world is evangelized. Some of them require actual suffering. Methodist preachers are of like passions with other men. They know it, and therefore have they adopted a system which, by its authoritativeness, will not allow of the indulgences and evasions of selfishness, and, by the frequent changes which it effects, distributes and relieves the inconveniences which it imposes. What would become of these indigent appointments if the appointing power were vested in the whole conference, or a committee of its appointment, subject to an appeal to the conference? Who would appoint himself to such posts? Who would not feel disposed to escape, by all possible means, the embarrassments and sufferings which most of our preachers now endure? Some there might be, who, brave of heart, would court perils, and exult in the brunt of the battle; but many, without doubt, would seek the securer posts. We have expressed the conviction that one-third of all our appointments would be left unsupplied in a few years after such a revolution in our ecclesiastical polity. We do not depreciate our preachers by this remark. It is based on a correct knowledge of human nature—all who understand human nature will accede to it. Their work is *militant*. Like men in battle, they know they must suffer—must stand amidst mortifications and perils which are rarely matters of voluntary choice; and therefore, like soldiers in the emergencies of war, they pledge themselves to obey their leaders; but those leaders are of their own constitution, and the measure of obedience is of their own devising. Selecting the fathers of the ministry for their superintendents, they say unto them, "Here we have no abiding city," and,

"though bonds and afflictions await us, yet none of these things move us; neither count we our lives dear unto us, so that we might finish our course with joy, and the ministry which we have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God:" point us, therefore, to the positions most suitable for us. Let them be easy or perilous, secure or dangerous, "here are we, send us." This is the language of a genuine Methodist preacher; and this is not the language of servility, but of a heroic spirit of self-sacrifice, produced, under God, by that truly militant system which some, indisposed to its labors or impatient of its authority, would abolish. Let it be abolished, and the permanent triumphs of Methodism cease—our ministry will become like other ministries. What other preachers go, or would go, where Methodist preachers go? With all their poverty and illiteracy, are they not the front line of the American ministry on the borders of civilization? and do they not, in our older communities, perform labors and sustain burdens which few, if any, of the clergy of other sects do? And how, but by the peculiarity of their system? Let it not be objected that the English Methodist preachers are subject to no such absolute control. If it were true, yet there is no analogy between the cases. There is no English preacher who does not get a comfortable support, either from his people or the funds of the conference. The English Conference receives no appointment except as a mission, unless it can support a preacher. The most essential differences between the ecclesiastical organization of the Wesleyans and ourselves are: 1. That the highest officer of the former is elected annually, while those of the latter are perpetual. Mr. Newton

remarked, on this subject, at our General Conference, that their "president never dies." If the officer is changed, yet the office is perpetual; and he, as well as Dr. Fisk, has testified that the power of the Wesleyan president is greater than that of the American bishop.

2. The appointments of the English preachers are made by a committee. This is virtually the case in the American church, the presiding elders being, to all intents and purposes, such a committee, in conjunction with the bishop. And, for our own part, we would rather have such a committee, composed of men who, from their official position, can have a knowledge of the general demands of the work, and are not liable to the interferences of personal interest, than one composed of men who have a common place with ourselves in the list of appointments. The English preachers were subject to an individual and absolute appointing power until about the time in which their fiscal system allowed of a modification; and the appointments of its committee are generally as inexorable as those of our committee of presiding elders and bishops. Indeed, a large majority of Wesleyan preachers have no voice whatever in the proceedings of their conference. But one hundred can act at all, as instituted by Wesley.

We believe Methodist preachers are almost universally and immovably attached to their present government. A few aspiring or disappointed spirits may revolt; a few more of better integrity may, for want of a close investigation of its advantages, wish for a change; but the latter generally come out right in the end; and the former have never permanently injured us, and have never been succeeded by the providence of God. Meanwhile Methodism has advanced in tri-

umph. Tens of thousands have flocked to her ranks almost yearly, hundreds of thousands have gone up to heaven from her pale, and hundreds of thousands are on their way. They have been opposed at each step of their advancement, but they have pressed onward. In the village and in the city; in the wigwam of the savage and the hut of the slave; on the shores of the Puritans and on the banks of the Columbia; amidst the colds of Canada and the savannas of Texas, the preachers of this "despotic" system are suffering and triumphing. On them and on their fields God has deigned the greatest outpourings of his Spirit in modern times; and there is but one prospect before them if they will preserve, unimpaired by innovation, their economy and doctrines, and that is, universal progress.

Second, it will explain *the indisposition of the church to change its polity*, by conforming it to the notions of those who clamor for what they call a republican church. There are theocratic traits of the Christian church which will not allow fully of such a character. The most ostensible department of the church—the ministry—is not representative. It cannot be created, though it should be sanctioned, by the people. God alone, by the election of his Spirit, can appoint men to preach; and such as he calls are the divinely authorized expositors of his truth, and administrators of evangelical ordinances and discipline. The question of religious liberty pertains not so much to the church as to the state. Where the civil government imposes no religious system, the rights of conscience are guaranteed. Under its broad shelter men may properly form the most rigorous religious combinations, provided they can enter into and retire from them voluntarily.

The appointing power of the Methodist episcopacy we have shown to be one of the most essential features of our polity. When it is abolished, our itinerancy will become a nullity. And yet this is the peculiarity of our system which is most abhorred by "reformers," so called. And why this hostility to it? Is not its chief pressure on the ministry? and is it not a creation of the ministry itself? Our bishops do not usurp this high prerogative; but the ministry itself, as we have shown, maintains it, and appoints the bishops to bear it. The ministry can repeal it if it pleases. Why, then, this outcry against an authority which is voluntarily sustained by those who suffer its chief inconveniences? Is it said that "such a prerogative involves undue power? it is inconsistent with the republican principles of the country?" &c. We have shown that it is not more so than some usages which the civil policy of our country creates and sanctions. The Methodist community are as true to their country as any other sect; but they have found their religious economy peculiarly successful; it was not devised, but grew up providentially; and, being assured of the protection of their individual rights by the civil law, they have not deemed it wise to risk its efficiency by attempting to adjust it to the relative rights of its different subjects, but consent to a mutual sacrifice for the common good. Their only object being "the spread of holiness," their only inquiry is, How shall we most effectually accomplish it?

Third, *the influence of this single impression will be powerful.* Let it be the universal idea of the church that we may lead on the aggressive movements of Christianity, and our zeal will be redoubled. Heretofore we have been surprised at our own success, with-

out a definite inference of its future results. We have exclaimed, "What hath God wrought!" and wondered whereunto it would tend. Standing now far in the front of the religious bodies of this great nation, and prominent in the van of those of Europe, we ought to project plans for the future; and they should be sublime ones, befitting the gospel, and comprehensive as our lost world. Our zeal should look forward to the time when Methodist itinerants shall traverse the wilds of Africa and the deserts of Tartary, and shout for joy along the Andes and the Himmalayah. But this is enthusiasm—yes, it is; yet it does not transcend the power or the promise of God. It is the enthusiasm that inflamed the prophets, and bled on the cross for our redemption; and it must yet thrill through the church before it will put on its full energy. Heretofore it has moved by occasional impulses. Ever and anon a glory, as of the latter day, has dawned upon it, but been followed by darkness; but now good men are looking at the signs of the moral heavens with new eagerness and hope. In all lands great and effectual doors are opening. New means of spiritual warfare are constantly arising. A special providence seems to control the course of civil events. The political arm of antichrist at least is broken, and the crescent of the false prophet but gleams on the horizon. The idea is becoming general in the church that the morning of the latter day is approaching—that the final battle is at hand. In these circumstances, how stands Methodism—one of the largest corps of the evangelical host, disciplined and hardy by a century of conflicts, possessing energies unequaled by any other sect, and lacking only a more definite conception of its true capability to en-

able it to send trembling among the powers of darkness? We have a better idea of the nature of our mission than of its extent. We work well at the posts which have fallen to us, but show a culpable hesitancy in assuming our true position. Denominations of much less strength are before us in their efforts for education, missions, &c., and their influence on the public mind. Being first in numerical strength, it devolves upon us to be first in all Christian efforts; but we are not yet second. Our missionary contributions are an example: our present income would be about quadrupled by each member paying only a cent a week. Let the idea of our special mission be generally received, and it will arouse us from this apathy; and, when once awakened, we shall find our resources a hundred-fold greater than we have apprehended them to be. O that the young generation of Methodists, to whom is committed the future, may understand their "high calling," and "acquit themselves like men!" Let them be admonished that theirs will be a position of rare responsibility, and, if faithfully sustained, as glorious in honor and reward.

THE END.

2086
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